



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

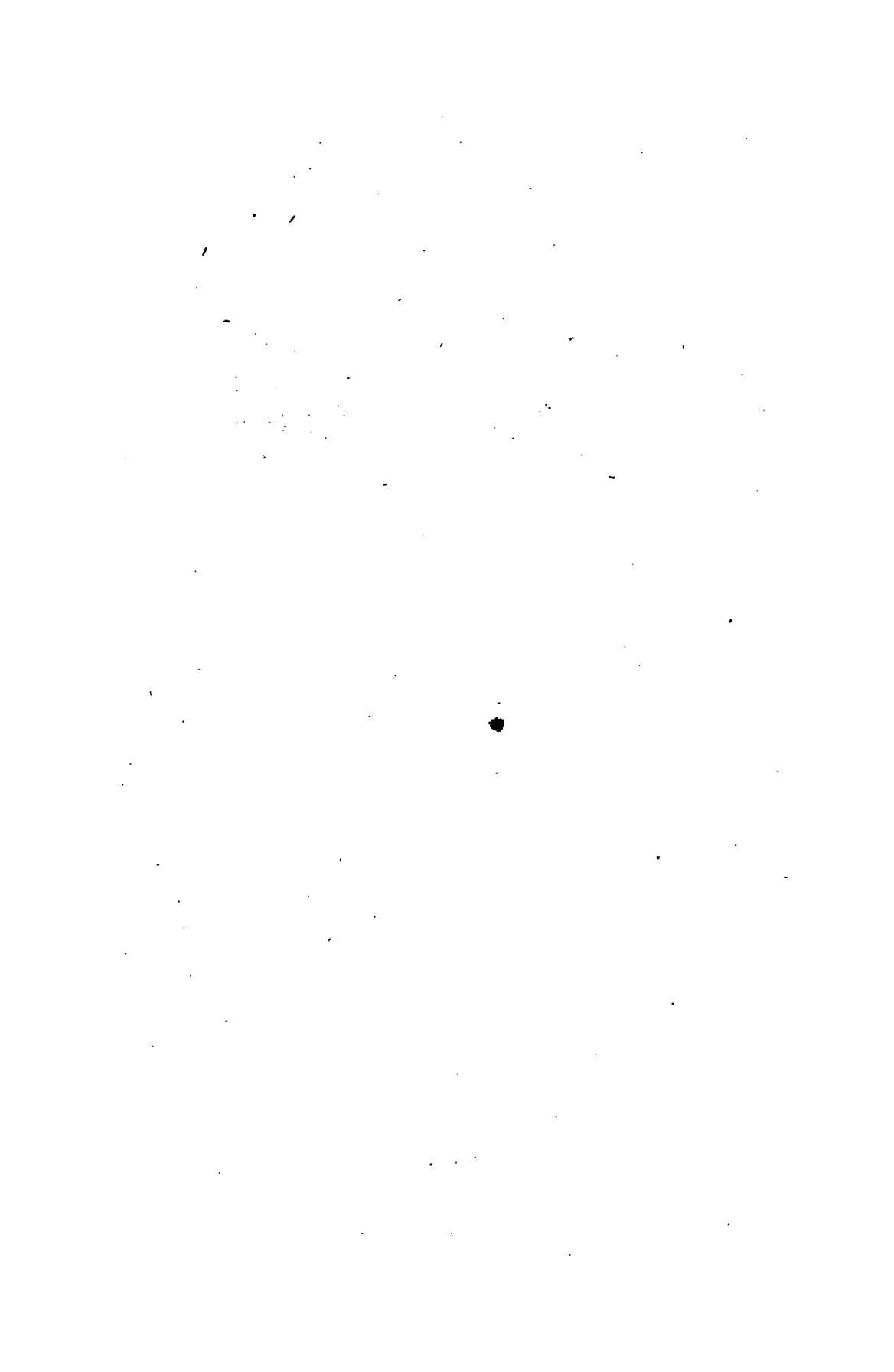




600010776R

26. 633





S. H. 1826.
A TREATISE

40

ON THE

EVIDENCE



OF

THE SCRIPTURE MIRACLES.

BY

JOHN PENROSE, M.A.

FORMERLY OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.

LONDON :

Printed for

BALDWIN, CRADOCK AND JOY, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1826.

633.

G. WOODFALL, ANGEL COURT, SKINNER STREET, LONDON.

TO

WILLIAM,
LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

THE FOLLOWING TREATISE

IS INSCRIBED, WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF THE MOST SINCERE
RESPECT, BY HIS OBLIGED AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

	Page
PREFACE	ix

PRELIMINARY DISSERTATION.

SECTION I. Of the nature of miracles ; and that, under certain conditions, the exertion of an unequivocally superhuman <i>power</i> must be conclusive of a strictly divine <i>authority</i>	1
SECTION II. Of the objection that miracles justly require an absolute, not a qualified confidence : or that it is unnecessary and improper to interpose those conditions which have been laid down in the preceding Section	17
SECTION III. Of the question whether the performance of a miracle confers on the agent a lasting subsequent authority ; or whether it be necessary that the act of power performed, and the doctrine which may be declared on the credit of it, be connected by some more particular copula	39

CHAPTER I.

	Page
That the Scripture miracles, if really performed, or if performed in the manner related, were acts of a power unequivocally superhuman	52

CHAPTER II.

That we have sufficient evidence of these miracles having been performed, or of their having been performed in the manner related.

SECTION I. Of the direct evidence.....	82
SECTION II. Of the auxiliary evidence: and first of the <i>number</i> of the miracles.....	118
SECTION III. Of the evidence from the <i>impression</i> made on the original witnesses; and the fullness of that <i>conviction</i> which they entertained	126
SECTION IV. Of the objection that our evidence is mere party evidence, and that this is far from being truly the case.....	162
SECTION V. That the lapse of time since the miracles were performed has not weakened our grounds of rational confidence in the evidence or testimony on which they depend	182
SECTION VI. Recapitulation of the preceding arguments and conclusions; and also of the <i>probability</i> of the Christian system or doctrine, in behalf of which, principally, the Scripture miracles are alleged	194

CONTENTS.

vii

CHAPTER III.

	Page
That there is no such evidence in behalf of imposture...	224

CHAPTER IV.

That there may be reasons, some of which are apparent in the nature of the religion, and of the Scripture compositions, why more or stronger miraculous evidence was not afforded; and reason to doubt, also, whether any evidence of testimony <i>could</i> have been stronger than that which we possess	262
--	-----

CHAPTER V.

That in proving the truth of the Scripture miracles, it is unnecessary to draw a strict line of distinction between true and false pretensions to miracles	287
--	-----

CHAPTER VI.

Of the attention due to any other claims of miracles besides those which we find recorded in Scripture	301
--	-----

PREFACE.

IT is much to be remarked, even with regard to those topics on which mankind are on the whole the most nearly agreed, that every age gives preference to its own modes of unfolding them. The *evidences* of our religion are, among Christians themselves, a subject little liable to be made a matter of party ; and we might, perhaps, have naturally expected that, in the many centuries which have elapsed since its first establishment, some writer might be found to state them all with precision, or so that we should be unable to add anything to his statement, or to diminish anything from it. Yet we have a perpetual succession of new books on the evidences : every age imagines that it has some fault to find, or some defect to supply, in the arguments or expositions of the

age preceding : and this not only because the same arguments of infidelity are constantly shifting their structure or form, and require therefore to be obviated by different methods of proof ; but also because we can almost always detect some weak point, or some unconsidered assertion, in the processes adopted by former writers. Thus the tract of Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion, though it may be made a mine of intellectual wealth to the student, may often betray him into notorious mistakes. It is the same in general as to all similar works. As far as we can see, it is the Scripture alone, and this though written at a period very remote, and among a proud and bigotted people, on which that power of investigation and criticism, which time and circumstances have since bestowed, does not enable us to fix any charge of error.

If I am right in supposing that it is thus almost the order of nature, that every age should possess a literature of its own, even on subjects which are to all ages one common

concern, it can scarcely be necessary for me to make an apology for offering to the public a new treatise on miracles. If it be the fact, not only that writers are ambitious of substituting new treatises in the place of the old : (this ambition of theirs, if no public end could be gained by it, would be only a useless or even a mischievous vanity :) but also that few, if any, treatises are to be found, on perhaps any subject whatever, which come up to our notions of attainable excellence : in this case, every man, who has thought long and frequently, on such a subject as this, may hope to do something towards the general benefit ; may be justly solicitous, even though he cannot do all, yet to furnish some materials which a wise master builder, either of his own age, or a subsequent one, may be able to dispose in their proper place.

I may be permitted to add, also, that this great question of miracles is a question which not only may be thus supposed to admit of, but which also appears to me very eminently

to require, a new and accurate explication. The works on the subject which are now best known to the public are chiefly intended as mere refutations of that sophism by which Hume attempted to destroy the credibility of all miracles whatsoever. That sophism is now, I believe, almost exploded. To say the least, it has been very clearly confuted by every writer who has taken the pains to examine it. Nor have the pains so taken been unwisely bestowed. For though I know not that another case could be assigned, in which any man of Hume's splendid abilities has surrendered his understanding to such obvious fallacies as those adopted by him in his Essay on Miracles, yet the effect of those fallacies was very lasting and general, and from the nature of the soil in which they took easy root, demanded for their eradication a far more active industry than their inherent strength could deserve.

I have nothing to object therefore against those works on miracles, which have been directed primarily against the error of Hume. Se-

veral of those works are very ably written, and contain observations of much real importance on many of the bearings of the whole question. Still they are of necessity rather controversial than didactic, and can scarcely be expected to give a complete view of the subject to a reader unbiassed either by the infection or the dread of the particular error which they are meant to oppose.

In general treatises on the evidences of revelation, this defect, as I must here call it, of viewing the subject of miracles with too exclusive a reference to the sophism of Hume, does not appear to exist. The general evidence of the real performance of the miracles has often been in such treatises very clearly unfolded; and if it had suited the object of Paley's work on the evidences to treat of miracles with no less detail of particulars, as to the nature and character of the miracles performed, than that which he has given of the deductive testimony which we possess that the history of our religion has been transmitted

faithfully from its origin, little would now, probably, remain to be added to the clear exposition which he would have made of the subject. But even the evidence of the real performance of the miracles it was not his object to state in detail, and still less to introduce into his very general treatise any discussion whatever of the *nature* of miracles; though this is an enquiry of great importance and interest, on which no man of reflection can fail to speculate; and without entering into which we can have no definition of miracles, nor be able with precision to understand what they mean; nor to appreciate the cogency of this strongest and most popular of all the evidences for the truth of our religion, and that which is most appealed to by our Saviour himself.

Of the particular treatises which engage professedly in the consideration of the *nature* of miracles, or of their exact import and character, Fleetwood's two short dialogues, and the Essay by Farmer, appear to me on the whole the most worthy attention:—the first on account of

its *talent* and penetration :—the second as a diligent and candid investigation of the various principles which may be brought to bear on the subject. But Fleetwood's tract, though it bears the stamp of great ability, is certainly inaccurate in some of its parts, and the very object of Farmer's is an erroneous object, being no other than to prove that unless we exclude absolutely the supposition that evil spirits may be permitted to work miracles, or unless we deny it to be possible that any miracle can be worked by any being in behalf of a falsehood, we can have no evidence that any miracle comes from God, or is to be accounted, under any circumstances, an undeniable attestation of truth. Of this opinion it is enough for me to say here^a that Farmer's whole treatise is tinged with it, and that, therefore, though valuable for the fairness with which it is written, and

^a I shall state the grounds of this opinion at length in the two first Sections of the Preliminary Dissertation which follows the Preface.

also for its justness on some particular points, it is still very liable to serious exception.

Many able observations on the true nature of miracles are to be found in an occasional sermon by Conybeare^a. But the compass of a sermon is scarcely adequate to the exposition of the principles to be considered in so extensive a question. This sermon, however, and another on the same subject by Powell^b, are the work of writers of very powerful understandings, and capable of appreciating whatever subjects they treated of.

But suppose all these principles fully explained : yet the writer on miracles, who contents himself with merely stating the logical principles of their nature and cogency, may still stop short of that portion of the whole subject, in which he might hope to be of the most extensive utility. Besides the principles which show the cogency of miracles, we have to prove the performance of those recorded in

^a Sermon at Oxford, December 24th, 1721, on Heb. ii. 4.

^b Discourse vii.

Scripture : and we ought to prove this also, not merely in gross, and with a general reference to even the notorious facts of the question, but also with a sufficient detail of particulars to make the whole evidence felt and familiar.

The object, which I shall in this treatise try to accomplish, is to connect, by as accurate a process as possible, a statement of the nature of miraculous evidence, with a detailed enumeration of the various evidences which we possess for the real performance of the Scripture miracles. I am willing to believe also, that in thus tracing out the subject, step by step, and from beginning to end, some illustrations of the subject may arise, which do not often occur to those persons whose previous reading on the evidence of miracles has not extended farther than my own.—The statement of the *nature* of miraculous evidence I shall attempt to comprise in a preliminary dissertation, in which it will be shown that, under certain conditions, the exertion of a power unequivocally superhuman

must be held conclusive of the divine authority. —This being proved, I shall be able to enter at once on the consideration or exposition of the practical evidence.—I should, perhaps, here add that in the preliminary dissertation, I transcribe two or three pages from a tract which I published two years ago, on the use of miracles in proving the truth of a revelation, the argument of which tract is here retraced and explained though in a somewhat different and more popular method.

The chief objection which I apprehend as likely to arise to this treatment of the great subject before me, is that it is unnecessary to encumber the practical part of the argument with the questions discussed in the preliminary dissertation. Wherefore, it will be asked, wherefore this proof that in the Scripture miracles we possess a certain sanction of truth: that they could not, under all circumstances, be performed by evil spirits, and that they must at least remotely imply a divine authority? Who doubts this, it will be said, in the present

age? What deist now imputes to magic, or to demoniacal agency, the miracles which we ascribe to Moses or Christ? Who is there who does not allow them, if performed, to prove the agent's divine authority, or who questions anything of them except their real performance? Why attempt to prove what is not brought into question? Why beat the air by thus solving objections which no modern incredulity is found to propose?

To this I answer, first, that the conversion of infidels is not, nor ought to be, the chief end of a treatise on the evidences of the Christian religion. Every treatise on the evidences, indeed, ought to be so constructed, that it may lead the infidel by a sound reasoning process, and independently of the authority of the revelation itself, to confess the truth of that revelation. But it does not hence follow that the conversion of infidels ought to be of such treatises the sole or principal end. Who would measure the utility of works on the being of God by the effect they may have had in the

converting of atheists? The greatest use which all such works can possess, and also of works on the evidences of Christianity, is not to multiply converts, but rather to guide the Theist and the Christian, respectively, to their strongest and most rational grounds of conviction; to supply the *science* of what they already *believe*, to throw the *sunshine* on objects previously discernible only by the light diffused in the atmosphere. The influence of such works on the Deist and Atheist is, at least in the main, an indirect influence; is not gained by putting personally *to them* the strongest refutations of their several errors, but by giving precision to the popular faith, and to that tone of religious argument and opinion with which the Deist and the Atheist have to contend.—It may also be remarked that the objections which will be alleged against the unprofitableness of some parts of my argument, are the very same objections which are alleged by the ignorant against the exposition of the first great proofs of God's being, the proofs derived from the marks of de-

sign in creation. Why this proof? they say: we knew this before.—But they did not know it on the same rational evidence, nor with the same security against those sceptical doubts, of which ignorance is the readiest victim.

Hence it follows that though those principles, which will be discussed in the preliminary dissertation prefixed to this volume, may not be the principles of any modern incredulity, they still may not be misplaced in a treatise on miracles. Those principles still constitute to the believer a necessary part of his entire series of proof: and they are the rather to be accounted a valuable part of that proof, because the notion that real miracles may be performed, and yet *not* be decisive of a divine authority, has certainly been the persuasion, if not of the present age, yet of most ages of which we have any historical record. The examination of an opinion which has been so widely extended cannot but be at all times a matter of moment, and of the greater moment because the influence of this opinion was notoriously consi-

derable in the age of the Gospel, the religious history of which is of far greater importance to us than that of any other age since the creation ; and because its influence did then affect materially the reception given to our Saviour's miracles.

These chiefly are the reasons which induce me to examine particularly those questions, which have been and may be proposed, concerning the nature and import of miracles. I have, in fact, not counted on any actual hesitation, in the present state of human opinions, to allow the conclusiveness of all miraculous authority : nor do I think that the existence of any such actual hesitation is necessary to the propriety of the plan which I follow.

Yet though I have not counted on the existence of such a hesitation as giving any value to this part of the argument, other than it derives from its natural importance, or its connection with the opinions either of the ancient world in general, or of the Gospel age in particular, I may be permitted to add that even some *modern*

objections to the strength of the evidence of the Christian religion do take root in that very hesitation. In a recent publication^a, for which we are indebted to Dr. Lee, the present Arabic Professor at Cambridge, it appears that the Mahometans do now actually apply, in their disquisitions on the evidence of the Scripture miracles, the same or nearly the same principles of hesitation as to the conclusiveness of even real miracles, which will be found discussed in the following pages. Like the well-known controversy between Orobio and Limborch, this publication consists of a real correspondence, written originally in the Persian language, between the late lamented Rev. Henry Martyn and two very acute Mahometan disputants : and what is most valuable in it is, that it sets distinctly before us the present views of well educated Mahometans as to the claims both of Christianity

^a Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mahommedanism, by the late Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D. and some of the most eminent writers of Persia, translated and explained by the Rev. S. Lee, A.M. &c. Cambridge, 8vo. 1824.

and of their own religion, and particularly the grounds on which they attempt to sustain their own pretension of the standing miracle of the Koran. With this end in view, it is of course the business of these writers, not to deny indeed the Scripture miracles, but still to accumulate such surmises against them, as shall show the supposed strength of their own miracle in the stronger light. And their way to this end is to make to miracles in general those very objections, to which even the most pertinent answers are thought by many persons mere idle answers to mere fanciful objections. These Mahometan writers urge expressly the objection refuted in Chap. v. of this treatise, that before any act can be accounted a miracle, it must be necessary to prove that it exceeds universal experience, and that "as the world is in a state of improvement, it cannot be known till the day of judgment that such an act is a miracle."^a The whole jet of their argument is to raise so high the real or the imaginable powers of

^a Controversial Tracts, pp. 194. 215.

magic, that in perfect conformity with what they hold on this subject, they might attribute to magic all the Scripture miracles^a. These tracts are written also with very great subtilty, and might serve to remind us that the scholastic philosophy, one of the greatest triumphs of intellectual ingenuity which the human mind has ever been known to accomplish, was in great measure transmitted through the hands of the Saracens.

The object of Dr. Lee in translating these tracts from the Persian, is to instruct Christian missionaries in the nature of those opinions which they may expect to meet with among Mahometan nations: that they may so learn to make for themselves some special preparation for those particular objections to the Christian doctrines and evidences, and those particular arguments for the truth of Mahomet's mission, which on their arrival in the East they will actually have to encounter. But a correct solution of those particular objections which thus

^a Controversial Tracts, pp. 211—213.

appear to be now actually raised by Mahometans against the conclusive nature of miracles, is beyond all question one of the most important points on which they can be called on to make such preparation. These particular parts, therefore of the present volume may not be without their own particular application to repress actually prevalent errors.

Still to me, however, the mere proof of the fact, that any subtile errors as to the nature of miracles are current in so large a portion of the world as is now devoted to the creed of Mahomet, would appear to demand of every reflecting mind an inquiry into the principles which we must take up for refuting them, even though we were unable to discern the actual means of turning those principles to a practical purpose in real discussion with a Mahometan disputant. The mere knowledge that the educated professors of a religion, credited by so many millions of the human race, hold *any* opinions concerning the nature of miracles, particularly when the same or similar opinions are known to have

been current in most ages throughout the world, is enough to induce us to discuss them accurately.

But it may, perhaps, be said that those principles of hesitation to admit as conclusive the evidence of miracles, which are considered in the following dissertation, are not the same with those adopted by the Mahometans. The doubts of the Mahometans, as was also the case with regard to many among the ancient heathens, arise from their believing that magic or enchantment may produce those works which we account to be miracles. The argument of my dissertation says nothing of magic: the question considered in it is not what *man* can achieve by means of any commerce with the occult powers of nature; but under what circumstances we may be satisfied concerning miracles that they possess undeniably the sanction of God, and cannot be attributed to *superhuman* agents acting independently of, or even against, His authority.

But though these two are, no doubt, different

questions, the argumentation which I adopt will apply to them both equally. Whatever is disproved of any superhuman being acting independently of, or in opposition to, God, is by the same arguments disproved also of any supposed power of magic. Magic also is nothing : *we* know that no commerce with any powers of nature can enable man to do anything which may justly rival the Scriptural miracles. But that other beings besides God may work miracles *seems* to be admitted even in Scripture itself, and in the sense in which the word "miracle" is used in this treatise, is assuredly a position which we cannot dare to deny. The discussion of this question, therefore, and of what proof we may still possess that the Scripture miracles are of divine authority, is a discussion which, while it carries along with it the whole question of magic, is in itself of incomparably the greater importance.

To recur once more to that particular bearing which this question has on the Mahometan argument. I have observed that the tendency

of that argument is to refer the performance of the Christian miracles to magic, and that this argument is to be refuted on the very same principles on which it will be here shown that they cannot be referred to superhuman agents acting independently of, or in opposition to, God. I would farther observe, also, that these very same principles afford an answer not only just, but also *direct*: and I think it almost evident that, if sufficiently pressed, the pious writer whose tracts against the Mahometans are preserved to us in this volume of controversies, would have brought in some shape this *direct* answer forward^a. But we have no reply by him to the second Mahometan tract which makes most expressly this charge of magic.

The reply to this second tract is from the hand of the editor. And it is here very remarkable that *he* evades altogether^b the Mahometan questions on the conclusive nature of miracles. He appears to advise that in address-

^a See Martyn, as above, p. 92.

^b Ibid. p. 534.

ing the Mahometan the ground of *miracles* be wholly abandoned, and refers to *prophecy* as a shorter and safer way by which to prove the decisive truth of Christianity. These observations, and from so able a pen, render it, I think, a point of the greater importance to clear as much as possible the whole question of miracles. If there be, indeed, any case in which, as directed *ad hominem*, the argument from prophecy be safer or stronger than that from miracles^a, yet it is the duty of the Christian to exhibit the full strength of both. If this of miracles be clouded by superstition, or rendered intricate by sophism or difficulty, we should be

^a We know that it was so thought by the early Christian apologists, and for the very same reason which seems to have operated with Dr. Lee, namely that their adversaries thought that the miracles might be accounted for by attributing them to magical agency. See Paley's Evidences, Part III. Chap. iv. v. How very remarkable to meet at every turn, among the unchanging inhabitants of the East, with the same opinions, as well as the same manners, which have been assigned to them from the earliest dawn of history.

the more diligent to explain the one, the more earnest to dispel the other.

I would gladly be permitted to request of Archdeacon Goddard not to omit some consideration of the Mahometan tracts here referred to, in his promised notes to the Bampton Lecture for 1823. It is evident, and particularly from the seventh Sermon, that he has given to the whole subject a long and careful attention.

A
T R E A T I S E,
E T C.

PRELIMINARY DISSERTATION.

SECTION I.

OF THE NATURE OF MIRACLES; AND THAT, UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS, THE EXERTION OF AN UNEQUIVOCALLY SUPERHUMAN POWER MUST BE CONCLUSIVE OF A STRICTLY DIVINE AUTHORITY.

A MIRACLE, if we speak of it merely as an event, without saying any thing of its author, or cause, is admitted by all to be, at the least, an event out of, or contrary to, that course of nature which comes under human cognizance, or which human experience and observation allow us to verify. Nothing contrary to that course can be effected by any merely human power or agency. To substitute a definition, therefore, which, instead of the effect, shall have for its subject the cause producing it, we may say also that a mi-

racle is an act above human power. These two definitions coincide entirely. But in alleging miracles to prove the truth of a revelation, it is a reason for preferring this last definition, that it brings before us immediately, and without waiting to make an inference, the agent whose authority is the point to be proved, and the proof of which is the sole object of our inquiry whether an event be out of the course of nature or no. A miracle may be defined, therefore, to be an act above human power^a.

^a I must not be understood, in what is said above, to affirm that the definition of miracles as events contrary to the course of nature, and the definition of them as events above human power, are to be accounted actually convertible definitions, or as being only different forms of the same. Acts *above* human power may be *in* the common course of events. Superhuman beings may perform those acts habitually, and if it be contended that such acts so performed are not entitled to the appellation of miracles, I undertake not to uphold in this particular case, or in others similar to it, the exact propriety of that appellation. But since superhuman agency is the only point in a miracle which I see any reason for attempting to prove, the proof would be encumbered by here bringing into the definition niceties which concern only the *name* of the act. *In the proof of a revelation*, we may account every act a miracle which certainly indicates a superhuman agent. See note A, at the end of the volume.

The evidence afforded by the performance of such acts, admitting or proving them to be really performed, is the plainest and most popular of all evidences for the truth of any divine revelation. Nor, indeed, can any evidence be more certain than this. Nothing can be more correct than that natural impulse which led our Saviour's contemporaries to exclaim, " Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."^a And hence, accordingly, the chief practical end, which ought to be designed in a general treatise on miracles, is the proof of the fact, or of their real performance. This alone is that point of the case which modern infidels appear to deny. This also is the chief object of the following treatise ; and if we first lay down a few elementary principles, which may be rendered evident to all attentive inquirers, carries every thing else along with it, and is altogether decisive of the divine origin of Christianity.

These elementary principles it is my intention here to discuss. It is not possible, without

^a John, iii. 2. Compare ix. 16, 33.

correctly ascertaining them, to appreciate the conclusiveness of even real miracles; and though a sound understanding is not likely to be stopped, by any merely theoretical difficulty, from acknowledging that miracles like those of the Scripture are certainly conclusive, if really performed, yet no person who has been accustomed to read or reflect on the intricate questions which have been proposed on this subject, can forbear to expect some previous solution of them.

One of these questions is rendered familiar to all of us by being brought into notice in the sacred volume itself. We read there, that some of the Jews, who admitted that demons had been cast out by our Saviour, yet attributed this miracle not to God but to Beelzebub^a. The natural refutation of this Jewish objection our Saviour himself sets before us in answer to it; and is, in effect, that it is absurd to suppose that Beelzebub would assist in his own overthrow^b. So far as this objection goes, we assuredly cannot require any additional or more satisfactory answer: but many other questions still remain

^a Matt. ix. 34, xii. 24, and the parallel passages in the other Gospels.

^b Matt. xii. 25, 26, etc.

undisposed of, questions also which are of much real importance to a clear apprehension of the nature of miracles, and of their conclusiveness of the divine sanction or authority for doctrines which they attest as coming from God.

I. Thus, in the first place, it may be very naturally asked, in what manner a miracle, which is in itself merely an act of power, can be alleged as evidence of the truth of a doctrine?—This must, of course, be, because it is alleged in attestation of the authority claimed by the agent or teacher. A miracle is nothing, that is, nothing in the way of evidence, unless so alleged; unless so alleged, may be a mere idle wonder, or rather is evidence of nothing more than the mere power which is, of course, displayed in the act. But when claimed as an attestation, it confers on the person producing it the authority of that being whose power it evidences. Thus if a messenger, claiming to bear a commission from any distant friend or superior, were to produce to us a signet known to be genuine, his possession of that signet may be a full proof of his claim. To complete that proof we require only the conditions that we know it to be a signet which could come from that person only

from whose hands he professes to have received his commission, and that we also know that it could not be stolen. This, too, is precisely our own case with regard to miracles. Define a miracle to be an act clearly divine, and it stamps on the doctrine, for which it is produced or alleged, the sanction of a clearly divine authority. Nothing can be more infallible than this conclusion.

It is plain, also, that if we suppose the power of working miracles to be at any time communicated to human beings, as when we say that the apostles and prophets performed them, we suppose those *men*, of whom we here speak, to perform them, not of themselves, but either by the divine, or at least by some other superhuman assistance. It is also plain that the divine or superhuman power assisting is properly to be accounted the real agent in the case.

II. If, then, the power be clearly divine, it is certain that the authority must be divine also. But here arises the question, and a question naturally suggested even by that ascription of miracles to evil spirits, which we read in Scripture to have been common among the Jews, whether there be any miracles which can be referred to

God only : and if not, or if we cannot contend that the power which they evidence must in itself be divine, whether we can have, nevertheless, any other means of inferring that they must still argue the divine sanction and authority.

The difficulty of this question has been often sensibly felt. That there may be beings who, though inferior to God, are yet possessed of more than human power, is doubtless a position which cannot be denied. We even read in Scripture that such beings exist, and that they intermix themselves in the affairs of mankind : and it is at least not obvious, that any powers which they may possess can be in any way limitable by human faculties. And though our Saviour's argument, that, "if Satan cast out Satan he is divided against himself"^a, be extended to mean, that where the doctrine is good, the author of the miracle cannot be evil, still this argument goes not the whole length of the question. Though surely a sufficient argument for the purpose He designed in it, yet we have still to ask what security we can possess, that

^a Matt. xii. 26.

even in a case where the doctrine is good, the sanction of miracles must be, properly speaking, *divine*. If our security against deceit is not *power*, but *doctrine*, yet how can we be assured that even a good doctrine comes to us absolutely on God's authority, and not merely on that of some inferior good being, whose sanction may not necessarily be an infallible sanction, or, at all events, not strictly divine?

Besides this, also, do we not reckon on miracles, not only as a sanction of doctrines evidently good, but also as one evidence of their actual goodness? May it not be reasonable to allege a miracle as authority even for doctrines, which, as far as we can judge of their goodness only by the light of reason or nature, may seem to be of a doubtful or indifferent character? But how can this be, if the character of the doctrines be a part of the evidence of those miracles themselves? If miracles may be performed by evil beings in support of doctrines which are in their nature evil, may they not be performed also without the sanction of God, in support of such doubtful or indifferent doctrines: and, on this principle, is not the doctrine

itself every thing, and the sanction of the miracle futile or worthless^a?

In answer to these questions, it is contended by some persons that, though superhuman beings inferior to God may possess some sphere of operation of their own, and of course may perform acts which are above human power, yet that a real miracle, or one which may be counted as evidence for the truth of Christianity, or of any other religion, is out of that sphere, or

^a It may here be worth observing that there are two different cases in which the character of the doctrine which professes to rest on miracles may come before us for consideration, and that the case here before us is not the principal of them. A doctrine professing to rest on miracles may be opposed on the two pleas following: the one, that admitting the real performance of the miracles, they still may not prove the divine authority: the other, that we may discredit their real performance. The *first* of these alternatives is that which comes before us here, and in every statement of the whole question must be considered distinctly. The *second*, and the more important, comprises that part of the argument in which the objection that we argue in a circle, or that we prove the doctrine by the miracle first, and then the miracle by the doctrine afterwards, is commonly met with. Of the nature of the stress which may be justly laid on the doctrine in the proof of this point of the real performance of the miracle, I speak at length in Chap. II. Sect. VI.

is beyond the power, which any of those beings can be supposed to possess, or is an actual contradiction of the law of nature, which is God's work, and which His hand alone can alter or violate.

And it is contended, secondly, by those who acknowledge the impossibility of limiting in any degree that sphere of operation which may be possessed by beings of more than human power, that, whatever their powers may be, they are never permitted to work miracles, except under the special direction of God : that our Saviour's argument concerning those miracles, which were by the Jews attributed to the agency of demons, does not imply that any were actually wrought by them :—and that God himself, therefore, either by his own personal act, or by that of beings under his own special direction, is properly to be accounted the sole author of all real miracles whatsoever.

If either of these answers could be completely substantiated, nothing can be more certain than that we should have an answer in point ; and an answer, which, if we could also prove of the Scripture miracles, that they agree with the condition so proposed or suggested, would at

once establish them as affording to our religion a sanction or authority clearly divine. But unhappily they both of them include incautious assumptions, or positions, to the proof of which our knowledge cannot extend. Of events which, like all miracles, are clearly above human power, man cannot institute any comparison. It is wholly impossible, if we allow the existence and operation of beings interposed between God and man, to put any limitation to the power possessed by those beings, or to draw any distinction between God's power and theirs. To His almighty power theirs is doubtless subordinate. No creature can *vie* with the Creator in any thing. But the difference between their works *we* are not skilled to appreciate. Once take an event which is beyond the power of man, and we know not in the least whether an angel's hand could perform it, or whether it require a power which God has reserved to himself. And though the *moral* qualities which an agent discovers, may, I apprehend, in some cases, prove the truth of his doctrine, yet still those qualities cannot give to the doctrine any higher *sanction* than that of the agent himself.

It may be improper to say, also, that God can

alter, or violate, any law which he has himself established. He is a Being in whom there is no variableness. We allow that a miracle is an event contrary to, or inconsistent with, that course of nature which we can deduce from our own limited observation and experience; but the law of nature, or of God, in its larger sense, is a law which man cannot discover. What with us are miracles, that is, discrepancies from, or exceptions to, those laws by which *our* world is *seen* to be governed, may still be with God, on certain occasions, events no less natural than the rise and fall of the tides, and no greater violations of His order or system^a. It is impos-

^a See Butler's *Analogy*, Part II. Chap. iv., and Bonnet's *Philosophical and Critical Inquiries concerning Christianity*, Book II. Chap. ix. Engl. Tr. I may here add, that as it is common to speak of miracles, and even to define them, as being *supernatural* events, the observations in the text will enable us to judge how far it is correct to speak of them by this appellation. If by supernatural we mean events inconsistent with those laws and that course of nature which come under human experience and observation, our use of the word is no less correct than convenient. But if, on the other hand, we mean events inconsistent with those doubtless much more comprehensive laws, which may have been stamped on universal nature by God, it is a word which we cannot and ought not to use.

sible for us, therefore, to pronounce of any act whatever, whether it indicate in itself a power strictly divine, or only some evidently superhuman power.

But if this be impossible, it is no less impossible, also, to contend, that no beings who are inferior to God can be permitted to work miracles without his special direction. If there be *evil* spirits, as the Scripture assures us, it is sufficiently clear, from what has already been said, that the powers of those spirits must be by us illimitable. We cannot deny to them, therefore, the power of working miracles. We cannot say of them, that, while engaged in doing *evil*, they act under the special direction of God : nor can we deny to good spirits, or, rather, speaking more strictly, we cannot deny to *any* superhuman being the same natural powers, or the permission of acting in the same degree, independently of any power but their own.

A mere miracle, therefore, cannot ~~in~~ in itself, cannot as a mere act of some superhuman power, the only power we can affirm to subsist in it, be accounted decisive of a strictly divine authority. Its possessing that authority must be matter of inference from some other condi-

tion or conditions possessed by it. It remains to be seen, therefore, whether we can assign such conditions, and whether the Scripture miracles may be found to possess them.

Here, then, we have to observe, that though the mere power which is exemplified in any miracle whatsoever can prove directly only a superhuman authority, yet, *if that authority cannot be any way invalidated*, it may prove remotely, also, the divine sanction. Any declaration which a superhuman being may make to us, must, in the absence of all contradictory evidence, stand on the highest possible ground of credit. Error is inevitable, if such a being deceives us on points on which we can oppose nothing to his authority. But it is, I believe, a law of nature, that in *all* practical questions we are bound to credit the best evidence we can procure; and this especially when all the evidence is on one side, and nothing but scepticism or surmise on the other. At all events it is a law both of revelation and reason, that the Father of the universe will not allow us to be deceived by any inevitable or invincible error. In all intellectual, as in all moral difficulties, we may be fully assured that He “will not suffer

us to be tempted above that we are able to bear ; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.”^a

I assume, therefore, unhesitatingly, that if an erroneous doctrine be taught on the authority of a superhuman agent or agents, we shall yet have means given us of discerning that error so taught, or of discerning that the doctrine is not credible. Those means, if any, must be either the means of discerning some inconsistency of the doctrine taught with the truths which we know by nature or reason, or with the doctrines of some admitted revelation ; or, if not this, must be some express refutation of that authority for which the miracle is claimed, by some other equal or superior authority. None will contend that the authority of a miracle can possibly be disputed on other grounds than on these.

Though as mere acts of power, therefore, we cannot affirm of miracles that they are necessarily the sole act of God, or that they cannot be performed by any subordinate beings, even

^a 1 Cor. x. 13.

beings of whose nature we may have no right to affirm that it is wholly incapable of deception or error, the proof which they afford may be still complete and decisive. God still sanctions, if he does not refute them:—that is, if he does not afford to man the necessary means of refutation. If there be no such means, it follows indubitably that the performance of a miracle, or the real exertion of any unequivocally superhuman power, is conclusive of a strictly divine authority, in any revelation which it may be brought to attest ^a.

^a See Note A at the end of the volume.

SECTION II.

OF THE OBJECTION THAT MIRACLES JUSTLY REQUIRE AN ABSOLUTE, NOT A QUALIFIED CONFIDENCE, OR THAT IT IS UNNECESSARY AND IMPROPER TO INTERPOSE THOSE CONDITIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN LAID DOWN IN THE PRECEDING SECTION.

Nothing, as it appears to me, can be in itself more clearly irrefragable than the argument which has been advanced in the preceding Section. Nothing can be plainer than that, if a superhuman power be exerted in attestation of a doctrine, it stamps on that doctrine a superhuman authority. Nothing can be plainer than that, if we grant the existence of any other superhuman beings besides God, it is impossible for man to draw any distinction between the powers which those beings may possess, and power which may be accounted strictly divine. Nothing can be plainer than that man cannot deny that such beings may possibly exist, and may be permitted to interfere in human affairs, or than that their authority must always be irresistible, unless either alleged for untenable doctrines, or expressly refuted by some

other equal or superior authority. And hence it follows, that if the miracles of Scripture do clearly evidence a superhuman power; if the doctrines for which those miracles are alleged be doctrines consistent with natural reason, and if also the authority of the superhuman agent performing them be not refuted by any, at least, equal authority, their attestation is an irresistible attestation, or is a strict proof of the divine sanction or authority.

In this view of the subject I agree precisely with Clarke, who of all the writers who have treated this question particularly is by far the closest and most accurate reasoner. He proves distinctly that "a miracle is not rightly defined to be such an event as could not have been produced by any less power than the divine omnipotence"^a. He also proves that "it is not rightly defined to be that which is against the course of nature, or above the natural powers of created agents"^b. He admits that beings inferior to God, he indeed admits explicitly that even evil beings^c may work real miracles: and he shows expressly that the credibility of the

^a Evidences, Prop. xiv. p. 373, edition of 1728.

^b Ibid. p. 375.

^c Ibid. p. 379.

doctrine is necessary to prove the divine authority of the miracle ; or that to prove that authority it may become necessary to show that the doctrine is consistent with the light of nature and reason, and with the doctrines affirmed on the credit of any other miracles [either equally, or] more incontestible^a. I may remark that Paley also fully recognizes the justice of the same reasoning, where he observes on the “answer” made by the Jews to our Saviour’s miracles, namely the answer “that he wrought them by the assistance of Beelzebub”. “To this answer no reply could be made, but that which our Saviour did make, by shewing that the tendency of his mission was so adverse to the views with which this Being was by the objectors themselves supposed to act, that it could not reasonably be supposed that he would assist in carrying it on. The power displayed in the miracles did not alone refute the Jewish solution, because the interposition of invisible agents being once admitted, it is impossible to ascertain the limits by which their efficiency is circumscribed.”^b

^a Clarke’s Evidences, pp. 379—382.

^b Evidences, Vol. II. Part III. Ch. iv.

The whole of this statement is, I think, perfectly clear. Yet it may not be proper to omit here the consideration of a common and, perhaps, a plausible objection. This objection is, that to make our confidence in a miracle dependent on, or qualified by, any condition would paralyze the effect of even those divine miracles which ought to be received without the least hesitation. And on this ground it is contended that, if evil spirits could ever be permitted to work real miracles, no miracles could be decisive of the divine authority : and accordingly that there exists not any adequate evidence that miracles have ever been actually worked except by the special direction of God. But if this be so, if the mere proof that a miracle has actually been wrought in behalf of a doctrine, be enough to prove absolutely the divine authority, it is unwise and unnecessary to encumber the proof with conditions, either with the condition of the reasonableness of the doctrine taught, or the condition that the authority be not refuted.

In answer to this objection, I propose to show in the first place, that to require in miracles the conditions proposed cannot be expected to have the consequence here anticipated :

I propose to show, secondly, that both Scripture and reason appear, in certain cases, to point out expressly the actual reasonableness of these very conditions :

And then, thirdly, that without entering into the question whether real miracles have been ever performed except by the special authority and direction of God, it is certainly a question which ought not to be introduced into any argument as to their divine authority.

To state the objection, then, more particularly.

If miracles, it is said, be not in themselves an absolute test of the truth, the doctrine rested on even God's most signal miracles must come for discussion before they can be accounted decisive. But is not this discussion something more than we can expect from fallible man ? Labouring, as he does, under so much darkness of the understanding ; educated, as he is, in so many prejudices ; and exposed, as we believe, to the influence of temptations urged on him by beings above mortality ; how can we expect of him, by the mere aid of his weak reason, to resist an illusion which even real miracles may be worked to countenance ? How can we expect of him so to catechise the reasonableness of any

doctrine which he sees to be supported by miracles, as to be able to secure himself either from sometimes admitting the false, or even, haply, from rejecting the true? Seeing man what he is, must we not in such a case say of him, as the eloquent Burnet has exclaimed of Eve yet innocent? "*Æqui spectatores rerum humanarum haud tulissent tam imparem congressum. Quid enim si dolo malo Dæmonis, multiscii, et in rebus agundis versatissimi, victa fuerit imbellis fœmina!*"^a Under these circumstances, it is said, there can be no value in miracles, if we clog their validity with any condition whatever. If they are any thing, we must be bound to admit them as absolute and unequivocal proofs of the truth.

I. To this I answer, first, that these apprehensions are groundless, and that to introduce, as a condition of the validity of miracles, so easy a stipulation as that they shall not be inconsistent with truths otherwise known, and that they shall not be refuted by any counter authority, is by no means calculated to have the evil consequences so anticipated, or to weaken

^a Arch. Phil. l. ii. c. vii. p. 393.

essentially that practical influence which they ought, and must have been intended, to have. A miracle is, at the least, an act or exertion of some superhuman power, of a being at least able to interfere with, or alter, those laws of the moral or material universe which fall under the cognizance or observation of man. The acts of such a being, if brought forcibly home to us, cannot but take a powerful hold of our attention. They either make on our senses a very forcible impression; or they come to us on the evidence and authority of *testimony*, a species of evidence which, in point of *impression* also, has more effect than reasoning on the ordinary state of the mind.

On authority so evidenced, therefore, *supposing the miracles real*, it is certainly our natural propensity to rely, if not implicitly, yet with a very high degree of practical confidence. And though we insert the caution^a that the doctrine to be

^a It will be seen hereafter that I consider this caution as being perhaps a merely theoretical caution, since I do not contend that, in all human experience, any instance can be produced of a real miracle wrought by evil spirits for purposes of deception.

proved must be in itself consistent and credible, we may be assured that this caution cannot seriously check the natural disposition to rely on the authority of any real miracle which may be worked in a true or credible cause. All *natural* scepticism on the subject of miracles attaches to the question whether they were really performed, not, if performed, to the authority which they possess. I do, indeed, hold that if we had reason to think that the doctrine attested by any real miracle was inconsistent with reason, or with a rationally grounded authority, it might be just or reasonable to suspend our assent to it till we could prove its truth or consistency. But certainly our *impulse* would be to suspect that reason to be erroneous, and that authority unjust and unfounded, which might be alleged in opposition to so high a sanction.

Such, accordingly, was in fact the natural influence on the Jews of the miracles which our blessed Saviour performed. The Jews, the common people, either never suspected that even evil spirits might not perform real miracles, or, at least, did not account miracles strictly conclusive of the truth of every doctrine which

they might be alleged to sustain^a. They were placed exactly in the condition of those persons of whom the objector in this place supposes that they must necessarily vacillate as to the reception of any doctrine which might be sanctioned by even unsuspected miracles. They had, doubtless, on this point the same prejudices which the Pharisees had, though we may suppose they were less rootedly and less corruptly tenacious of them. And we may allow that the Pharisees, who, while they admitted the miracles, denied their validity, whether they denied it on the ground of their being worked by demons, or on any other ground, would have argued unimpeachably if they had been right in premising, that the doctrine of Christ was really inconsistent with the revelation which had been taught by Moses.

But though the common Jews had all the prejudices of the Pharisees, yet we know that their *impulse* was to credit the miracles. They argued, as we should do in a similar case, that these miracles were the true, those prejudices

^a John, ix. 16. 24. 30, 31. Compare ch. vii. 3. 12, and indeed nearly the whole of the seventh, eighth, and tenth chapters.

the erroneous, authority ; and that to refer the miracles, as the Pharisees had done, not to God, but to the power of evil spirits, was only a *fetch*, or evasion of theirs, to get rid of the force of a hard truth.

It is altogether certain, therefore, that to make the credibility of the doctrine a condition of admitting the authority of the miracle must be far from paralyzing the effect of real miracles. Certainly, if no instance can be found, in which, in point of fact, any real miracle has been worked for purposes of deception, the *effect* of miracles will be the stronger still : this security might be an additional security ; but cannot be necessary to give them that power over human assent for which any writer on the evidences of revelation needs to contend.

II. I now propose, secondly, to shew that both Scripture and reason appear in certain cases to point out expressly the actual reasonableness of those conditions which have been assigned, namely the condition of the credibility of the doctrine taught, and the condition that the authority be not refuted. This may indeed be collected from what is said by our Saviour in those passages to which I have already

referred, and in which he vindicates his own miracles from the charge of having been worked by demoniacal agency^a.—But there are other passages, also, which seem to prove the point more directly.

In Deuteronomy xiii. we find it written as follows : “ If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods which thou hast not known, and let us serve them ; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams ; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death ; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the

^a See p. 4, and note B at the end of the volume.

house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.”^a Of the application of this principle there is a very remarkable example in the case of Hananiah the prophet, recorded at length in the twenty-eighth chapter of Jeremiah.

Exactly in the same manner, St. Paul tells the Galatians, that though “an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”^b It is precisely the same also with regard to those false Christs and false prophets who are spoken of in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew^c, and of whom it is there said, and by our Saviour himself, that they “shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect.”

Let us suppose for the present that these predictions or miracles are to be accounted real, and not merely pretended. Whether real, or not, yet, at least, in the passages cited, the sacred writers do not dispute their reality, even

^a V. 1—5.

^b Ch. i. 8.

^c V. 24.

though they advance an argument against their *validity* in these same passages. The authority of an angel is superhuman of course. The attestation of miracles is a superhuman attestation ; and that of predictions, of which the essence is their miraculousness, is plainly superhuman also. Let it then be allowed that superhuman beings may really possess the power of working miracles to seduce men from the faith, either from their faith in the moral justice and holiness which we know by reason to be the attributes of God, or in the clear doctrines of God's authorised revelations. How then is it argued that we may be preserved from seduction ? How but by the examination of the doctrine taught ? by the power afforded us either by revelation, or reason, of discerning its consistency with what we know to be true : of making its consistency with what we so know a proof, or condition, of its admissibility ?

To this proof from Scripture nothing should need to be added. But in profane history also we may find evident indications that, in thus requiring of us to try the validity of any assumed prophetic authority by the nature and credibility of the doctrine advanced, God requires no-

thing of which the light of nature alone has not actually discerned the reasonableness.

Among other examples that might to this purport be cited, there is a story in Herodotus^a, that, during the Persian invasion of Lydia, Pactyas, who had opposed Cyrus, fled to Cuma. The Persians insisted on his being given up to them. We all know that, in that age, nothing was held to be more sacred than to preserve inviolate the laws of hospitality: and the Cumæans, though very fearful of provoking Cyrus by a refusal, yet shrank from the guilt of giving up a suppliant to certain death. In this dilemma they applied to the oracle. The response of the oracle was that they should give Pactyas up. And this they would have done, but that Aristodicus, one of their citizens, thinking that the response had not been faithfully transmitted, prevailed on them to try a second consultation.

The oracle again answered that they should give Pactyas up. On this, Aristodicus, who was now one of the applicants, went round the temple, and disturbed or plundered the nests which the sparrows and other birds had built

^a Clio, 157—159.

there. While he was doing this, a voice was heard from the inmost part of the building: "Impious man, what means this attack on my suppliants?" Aristodicus replies: "If you protect then *your* suppliants, how can you order the Cumæans to abandon *theirs*?" The oracle answers: "Yes! I order it that you may perish in the guilt you will contract by such flagrant impiety, and never come again to consult the oracle on the question of giving up your suppliants."

We here, I think, see plainly that the sense affixed to the oracle was a sense which may be with sufficient propriety termed *ironical*; exactly in the same manner in which the prophet Micaiah must be regarded as speaking *ironically*, where he answers to the question put by Ahab, whether he should go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle: "Go and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king."^a It is plainly implied that it was an impiety in the Cumæans to seek from the oracle a sanction for inhospitality; as it is implied that Ahab had

^a 1 Kings, xxii. 15.

sufficient reason to expect that a true prophet would prophesy evil concerning him. But farther also, in the response made by the oracle, the *structure* of the response, or its mere tone and expression, affords no symptom that there was any irony used. There was apparently nothing but the inconsistency of its tenor with the recognised laws of hospitality, which could at all indicate that it ought not to be acted on. It is implied that the reason, why Aristodicus judged rightly in not acting on it, was that he justly deemed the admissibility of the doctrine a condition without which he could not but hesitate as to the oracle's real authority.—This case includes also all that I argue for, in alleging the credibility of the doctrine taught as one condition which may reasonably be exacted of assenting to the evidence of superhuman authority.

It is equally plain, also, that as a superhuman authority may thus be invalidated by any inconsistency of the doctrine taught with other doctrines previously known or admitted, so it may be refuted also by opposite authority. The strength of the less must be compelled to yield

to the greater ; and though all affirmations on superhuman authority must, doubtless, be considered as being, *cæteris paribus*, equal ; yet still there may be circumstances attached to each case, which may show clearly which is the cause of God. Thus in the case of Moses, we read that he performed before Pharaoh certain miracles. “ And the magicians did so”, it is added, “ with their enchantments.”^a Now though we should grant that these magicians performed real miracles, and though we should grant, also, as we then consequently must, that in the acts performed there was nothing to indicate clearly that the authority of Moses was at all superior to theirs^b, yet still the circumstances and issue of the contest were, notwithstanding all these suppositions, a sufficient evidence of his superior authority. Bishop Sherlock, an exceedingly acute judge of evidence, is one of many writers who do actually make those circumstances and that

^a Exod. vii. 11, 22. viii. 7.

^b Thus that the rods of the magicians should be turned into serpents, cannot in itself be regarded as a less exertion of power, than that the rod of Aaron should swallow up their rods. Exod. vii. 12.

issue their ground for affirming the divine mission of Moses^a.

III. But still it is contended that all these various arguments are merely arguments *ad hominem*, or *ex concessis*; that though doubtless our Saviour had good reason for arguing on those principles which he found established among the Jews, and for showing that, even on those principles, even on the supposition that miracles might be performed by evil spirits, his own miracles stood clear of the charge; yet *we* may be entitled to sweep away that supposition; we still may free ourselves from all such delusions, and be entitled to take the stronger ground of asserting that all real miracles come solely from God, and that every miracle is therefore an incontestible proof of an absolutely divine authority. It is, in the same manner, denied that there was ever any thing superhuman in any of the responses of the heathen oracles, or in the acts performed by the Egyptian magicians. And it is alleged, accordingly, that all those passages of Scripture which appear at

^a Disc. X. Vol. I. pp. 285, 286. edit. 1754.

first sight to recognise the possession of any miraculous or superhuman power, by magicians, or witches, or by false prophets of any kind, are intended only to intimate that they pretended to miracles, not that they really possessed the power of working them.

In answer to this, I have to observe, in the first place, that it is not by any means my business to assert either the certain possession, or the actual exertion, of any miraculous powers, except those which are related in Scripture to have been performed under the special or immediate direction of God. I waive all argument for the opinions commonly received respecting the powers possessed by evil spirits, notwithstanding the great strength of those Scriptural grounds, on which the doctrine of their real power is rested. I do apprehend that the Egyptian magicians wrought nothing but mere delusion or chicanery. I can trace no evidence of more than human sagacity in any thing that can be proved concerning the heathen oracles. Where Moses, in Deuteronomy, warns the Jews against false prophets, I am far from supposing that he means to speak of their prophecies as being any thing more than mere impostures, or

that there was any thing miraculous in the coming to pass of the signs and wonders predicted by them^a. It is, I am persuaded, the same also with regard to those false Christs and false prophets whom our Saviour speaks of in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew. Nor do I suppose it St. Paul's meaning to state positively to the Galatians, that they would ever be tempted by having "any other gospel" preached actually to them by an angel from heaven^b.

But though all this be granted, yet it is wholly irrational to put the authority of *all* miracles on the footing of our being right in this view of the case. It has been, beyond all question, in most ages the common, and in some the universal belief, that evil spirits have power to work real miracles in behalf of delusion, but that we have always the power to avoid that delusion by examining the consistency of any doctrine so taught with the established autho-

^a "Then the Lord said unto me: The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart." Jer. xiv. 14.

^b Gal. i. 8. See also note C at the end of the volume.

rities of reason and faith, or by trying, as it is said^a, "what spirit it is of". That any beings do really possess this power of working miracles in behalf of delusion, or that there is good evidence of its having been ever actually exerted, we may, I think, be reasonably disinclined to believe, but I see not that we can dare absolutely to deny. That it cannot exist, or cannot be exerted, without invalidating the proof of *credible* doctrines, or doctrines consistent with the attributes of God, and also with the doctrines of any revelation, of which we either suppose, or prove him the author, is, beyond all doubt, a most unfounded assumption. Surely all those persons who have thought that evil spirits may really possess miraculous powers, cannot have been the dupes of so erroneous a logic as to believe revelation on the evidence of miracles, even while they held opinions which, if pressed to their consequences, would prove of miracles that they are no evidence at all.

The true state of the case is, that both reason and revelation teach us that error, especially error of the intellect, is exceedingly seductive,

^a 1 John, iv. 1.

and difficult to avoid : but still that to the humble and diligent mind God will always give sufficient means of avoiding it. What those means are, we can never pronounce *à priori*. And since none can say that superhuman beings may not interfere in the concerns of mankind, without God's express and special commission ; and particularly since we are taught to believe that, for the purpose of moral trial or temptation, they do interfere, and interfere habitually ; it is impossible to affirm that they may not have power to try us by the exercise and display of some superhuman authority, nor is it possible to affirm that even under such a temptation God may not enable us to escape or to bear it.

Hence it clearly follows, that even the evidence of miracles can be affirmed to be decisive only under certain conditions : and, clearly, these conditions can be only those stated before ; namely, the consistency of the doctrine for which they are alleged with the light of reason and nature, or of course with other doctrines previously known and admitted ; and also that the authority be allowed to pass unrefuted by any superior, or at least equal, authority.

SECTION III.

OF THE QUESTION WHETHER THE PERFORMANCE OF A MIRACLE CONFERS ON THE AGENT A LASTING SUBSEQUENT AUTHORITY: OR WHETHER IT BE NECESSARY THAT THE ACT OF POWER PERFORMED, AND THE DOCTRINE WHICH MAY BE DECLARED ON THE CREDIT OF IT, BE CONNECTED BY SOME MORE PARTICULAR COPULA.

IN the preceding Sections it is, I believe, sufficiently proved, both that a miracle cannot safely be defined as any thing more than an act above human power; and also that consequently we may require certain conditions to prove it conclusive of a divine authority. But a question arises, also, whether even these conditions are enough to hinder us from being possibly deceived. Granting these conditions, yet, if a mere man work a miracle once, and perhaps once only in his life, can we be certain that this miracle confers its authority on every doctrine which he may promulgate in the whole course of it? It is commonly supposed^a that this can-

^a Fleetwood on Miracles, p. 117—119, ed. of 1702. And Farmer, p. 330—334.

not be ; and that unless we connect the doctrine and the attestation together, by conditioning that the doctrine must be declared *first*, and the power confirmatory of it evidenced *afterwards*, and evidenced as its direct attestation or proof, we cannot allow the miracle to be proof of the doctrine ; that without this caution we cannot be assured that the power exerted may not have been given for one purpose, and the authority, which that power confers, abused to another purpose by human fraud or error. Thus it is said that God's impenetrable wisdom may have, and, it is commonly supposed, has, sometimes communicated the possession of supernatural powers to persons who may in their general characters be very undeserving of credit, may have so communicated them with a particular view to some single object or end ; and that it does not follow that because those persons were entrusted, for one particular purpose, with an authority which it is impossible to dispute, they must therefore be entitled to plead the sanction of that authority on all occasions on which they may be willing to claim it.—But if they declare their doctrine *first*, and *then* exert their power in confirmation of it, thus connecting the doc-

trine and its attestation together, the authority of the doctrine will thus be evidently established, together with the evidence of the attestation itself.

To this I answer, that though in the miracles of Scripture much of this cumulative proof may be found, much of this immediate connexion between the doctrine and its direct attestation, and though undoubtedly a copula thus immediate and particular may be, and is^a, of great importance in evidencing the real nature of the act performed, and in excluding all possibility of imposture; yet I do not see on what principle it can become *necessary* to substantiate a claim of superhuman authority. If a man, of whose chemical or mechanical knowledge I may have had proof at a time remote from the present, should now come and tell me that such or such facts are true, in the science of chemistry, or of mechanics, which he professes, I have still that evidence for crediting what he says, which I derive from my knowledge of his former skill. So, if a person whom I know to have formerly possessed a large portion of the confidence of

^a See Ch. I. of the following Treatise.

my friend,—if such a person tells me, even after the lapse of many years, of any passage of my friend's history, concerning which he may have had sufficient means of information, I, in the actual knowledge which I possess that they were at one time in habits of intercourse, have ground for crediting him, although I may not possess any evidence of there having existed any recent communication between them. And so, also, equally, if I am taught a revelation by a person whom I have known to exert at any time a power clearly superhuman. That power must still confer on him *some* authority. The credit due at all times to any person who has shown at any time clear proof of such power, and who now appeals to that proof as to his authority, cannot but be greater than that which, *cæteris paribus*, is due to a person who has never shown any such proof. He stands at all events in a very peculiar situation, a situation which gives him peculiar authority; and it does not appear that we can reject that authority, unless some specific cause be assigned why we may or ought to distrust it.

The only argument which can be alleged against this statement rests, I believe, solely on

some indications which, as it has been thought, are afforded in Scripture, that the authority which miracles have been given to sanction, may be withdrawn after it has been given; or, in other words, may be superseded. The chief argument to be derived from Scripture to this effect is from the remarkable history recorded 1 Kings xiii, of the man of God who went down from Judah, and was misdirected by the old prophet of Bethel to his own destruction^a. We see in this history a real prophet, appealing in form, and yet appealing falsely (though evidently without any impious intent), to the prophetic authority which he possessed, and making this appeal with the design of persuading his guest to commit an act of disobedience to God: which he commits accordingly, and is then punished with death. It appears to follow from this history, and I am ready to concede that it does follow from it, that this old prophet could not have had, in his act of misdirecting the other, that divine illumination which he had possessed formerly, and which, indeed, seems to have been restored to him immediately afterwards. And hence, doubtless, it also follows, that the having

^a Farmer, p. 332.

once been in possession of a clearly superhuman or even divine, authority, does not always and unequivocally confer that authority on the subsequent acts of him who possessed it.

There is little in the Old Testament to which a strict counterpart may not be found in the New: and to this case of the old prophet of Bethel, whose prophetic authority we thus find invalidated, it may be plausibly contended that we may add the cases of those persons, of whom we read, it is said, in the first age of the church, who although possessed of miraculous gifts, were yet men of irreligious dispositions, and of whom some, if not arrayed against Christ, yet opposed themselves to the authority of the apostles. I speak not here of any who set themselves up in actual hostility against the religion. It is hard to suppose that those *false Christs* or *false prophets* possessed any really miraculous powers^a. But were there not persons really possessed of those powers, who, though designing no fraud probably, and only too much elated by this great distinction conferred on them, and overset by personal pride and ambition, must have gone, and really did go, into heterodoxy? Is not this

^a See pp. 35, 36, and note C at the end of the volume.

also the *more* presumable, as we know that some even of the apostles themselves were divided among each other, divided on doctrinal points; —and if so, and if the possession, at any one time, of any superhuman or miraculous gifts, may be alleged at any other time as a miraculous attestation of a miraculous or superhuman authority, may it not be alleged for opposite doctrines?

For the sake of the argument, I *concede* this point also, though I must observe by the way that, because even men divinely commissioned carry the treasure entrusted to them “in earthen vessels”^a, are liable to be disturbed by human passions, and even to allow those passions to warp their doctrine, yet it would be a most rash inference that God may permit them (not only to work miracles in behalf of that cause which it was their real commission to declare or promulgate, but also) to *appeal* to miracles on points beside their commission, or for doctrines adverse to it. The *appealing* to miracles in behalf of the doctrine is, it will be remembered^b, one main ingredient in the nature of all miraculous

^a 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^b See p. 5, and note A at the end of the volume.

evidence; and assuredly we cannot deny it to be possible that, in order to promote the common cause of Christianity, God's providence may impart the gift of miracles even to the assertors of rival and inconsistent opinions, and may yet cause also that these miracles shall be *alleged* for those doctrines only which they hold in common, and which only it is His will to sanction. And this view of the case is the more deserving of consideration, because we see in Scripture itself^a, that the apostles *were* studious to make an evident discrimination between those precepts which they taught as strictly divine, and those which emanated from their own advice or opinion.

Waiving, however, all this, and granting it to be possible that, as the natural consequence of the position here affirmed^b, it may happen that one superhuman authority shall really be set up against another; yet assuredly this consequence interferes not in the least with the statement laid down concerning all such authorities, namely that miracles are attestations of the divine au-

^a 1 Cor. vii. 12. 25.

^b Namely of the position that the performance of a miracle *does* confer on the agent a lasting subsequent authority.

thority, not *absolutely* (which of course they cannot be, if they may be performed in behalf of opposite doctrines), but only *conditionally* that the doctrine be credible. If it be not credible, God will find means of conducting us even through the longest and most artificial labyrinth, which error, either human or superhuman, can possibly weave. Nor, indeed, is there of this principle any plainer illustration than may be derived from the exposition of the cases which have been produced, that of the prophet of whom we read in 1 Kings, xiii. and the imagined case of true miracles being appealed to by any teachers of false doctrines of Christianity: these being cases in which it has been usual to assign as the reason for disallowing the alleged authority, that the miracle wants that *copula* which connects it immediately with the doctrine taught.

In the first of these cases every reader feels satisfied that the man of God from Judah must have had sufficient means of determining that he was not at liberty on the authority of the prophet at Bethel, to violate the peremptory commission which he had received. Commentators have suggested that though the authority

of the prophet may have led him, perhaps, with some reason, to *suspect* that he was now to consider that commission as superseded, it must yet have been his duty to pray to God for illumination, and that he may have owed his death to the not having done so. But if he had means afforded, either by prayer, or otherwise, to rebut the temptation, it matters not what was the nature of the temptation, or what may have been those particular means. If, moreover, he may have prayed to God for illumination, why may he not, or rather must he not, have prayed to be guided aright between two inconsistent superhuman authorities?

So in the similar case of apparently opposite Christian miracles. The truth of the revelation is here supposed by both parties: and if means are given either by revelation, or reason, to determine which teacher promulgates doctrines in accordance with, and which promulgates doctrines in clear opposition to, those truths natural or revealed which we suppose, it matters not whether both, or only one of them, be permitted the power of quoting miracles on his side.

And let me here observe farther, with regard to the case alleged from the Old Testament, that

though we may apparently argue from it that, supposing a contest between opposite miracles, their authority must be strongest when they are declared in direct attestation of, or with an immediate copula to, the doctrine declared; yet this particular case, if it prove any thing more, must go to an extent which does not seem to have been anticipated. This case is produced in order to oppose the position, that “the miracles of a prophet may be performed first, and his doctrine be delivered afterwards”^a. Now the prophet of Bethel, at the time of his misdirecting the other prophet, was certainly not so far forsaken by all divine illumination and influence, as to be debarred from any future reception of it. We do not know but that he was under its influence habitually, and we read immediately afterwards, that “as they sat at the table, the word of the Lord came unto him”^b. The language which is in general used in speaking of him is such as we expect to see used of a person of eminent virtue, not of one abandoned by the holy spirit of God: and the *last* thing we hear of him, is that he declared a pro-

^a Farmer, ubi supra.^b 1 Kings, xiii. 20.

phency, which is one of the most noted and signal of all those which have no immediate reference to the future Redeemer.

If then we deny this prophet to have possessed a clear title to the credit of prophetic authority, and this even in the case in which he falsely assumed it, we must be prepared to go much further than merely to say, that because at one time an individual may have been entrusted with a superhuman commission, he still may not be entitled to plead that commission in behalf of all doctrines which he may subsequently declare. If we argue on the case at all, we must say that a person who may have habitual, or who may at least have frequent, communications of divine or superhuman light or authority, and these also kept up subsequently to his communications with us, yet has no right to expect that we should credit his plea of superhuman authority, unless he work a miracle to prove the specific authority of every specific doctrine delivered by him. On this footing, or principle, we might have refused to credit even St. Paul in every thing not proved by him with the immediate copula of a miracle.

But as no person will, I presume, carry the

objection this length, or deem such suspicion to be at all consistent with that rational faith which religion justly demands, the objection must consequently fall at once to the ground. It must remain true that every act of superhuman power, when appealed to in proof of a divine commission, confers on the agent a superhuman authority. We *must* then concede that *all* such authority cannot be asserted as being necessarily divine. But we then argue further that, as it cannot be distinguished from the divine, except by some incredibility in the doctrine affirmed, or, at least by some express refutation, so it must be certain that every *credible* doctrine vouched by any evidently superhuman power, and not refuted by any at least equal authority, does rest ultimately on the divine sanction.

CHAPTER I.

THAT THE SCRIPTURE MIRACLES, IF REALLY PERFORMED,
OR IF PERFORMED IN THE MANNER RELATED, WERE ACTS
OF A POWER UNEQUIVOCALLY SUPERHUMAN.

It has been sufficiently proved in the foregoing dissertation that every act of *superhuman* power, if appealed to in proof of a *divine* authority, is a conclusive evidence of the authority claimed, unless the doctrine affirmed on that authority be a doctrine incredible, or inconsistent with reason, or with truths otherwise known and admitted ; or unless the authority be expressly refuted by some other equal or superior authority.

Now that the Scripture miracles are appealed to is plain. Our Saviour declares : " The works that I do, they bear witness of me. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not ; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works"^a. No appeal can be expressed more distinctly. And so also Moses, in attes-

^a John, v. 36, x. 25, 37, 38.

tation of his authority, refers perpetually to the "mighty hand" of the Lord, to the "signs and wonders" wrought in Egypt and elsewhere^a.

On this foundation, it is easy to see what it is which constitutes the remaining part of our proof that the Scripture miracles prove the divine authority of the religion taught in Scripture as coming from God. That remaining part must be comprised in proving: first, that those miracles, if really performed, or if performed in the manner related, were acts of an unequivocally superhuman power: secondly, that we have full evidence of their real performance: and lastly, that the doctrines, which these miracles attest, possess the requisite conditions of credibility, or are not inconsistent with truths otherwise known, and are not refuted by any counter authority.

All these points I shall establish separately, and in their turns, with more or less detail, as may appear to be necessary. We then draw immediately the certain conclusion that the authority of our religion is strictly divine.

^a See for instance Deut. iv. 10—14, vi. 21—25, xxix. 2.

In the present chapter, it will be proved that the Scripture miracles, if really performed, or if performed in the manner related, were acts of a power unequivocally superhuman.

But is not this evident on our first glance at the subject? To take, for example, some of our Saviour's miracles.—The raising of the dead, the restoring of sight to the blind, the walking on the sea, and a visible ascent into heaven, are acts wholly beyond the power of man. If it be otherwise, let us see man do the like. If he can do this without superhuman assistance, we will retract our assertion that those Scriptural miracles are a sufficient evidence of superhuman agency.

This is our argument, and the point here affirmed, that, *if* our Saviour performed the acts we ascribe to him, he performed acts clearly above the power of man, is not often, I suppose, seriously denied. And that acts were performed which do really indicate the clear exertion of a superhuman power, will in the following chapters come to be proved in detail. I propose to shew *here*, that those principles of estimation, by which such acts are accounted at least superhuman, are beyond all doubt cor-

rect principles ; or that there is no foundation for any possible surmise, either that we under-rate the power of man in asserting that the Scripture miracles go beyond it, or that they can have been events merely casual, though extraordinary.

These surmises, I may add, have been sometimes thrown out. I shall divide the disproof of them under the three following heads.

I. That in affirming that the Scripture miracles, if performed, were acts universally beyond the power of man, we affirm more than it may be strictly necessary to prove. Instead of affirming this universally, or *absolutely* ; it might be enough to affirm it *relatively* to those circumstances in which the authors of those miracles were placed.

II. That no imaginable improvement of the powers of human invention, or artifice, can bring man even a single step nearer to the performance of such miracles as those of the Scripture.

III. That we are entitled to exclude peremptorily all supposition that those miracles happened by chance ; or that the teachers of our religion can possibly have availed themselves

of any fortuitous, though rare contingencies, to ground on them a claim of superhuman authority.

I. First then ; it was observed that if any mere man perform acts which are precisely similar to the Scripture miracles, we retract our assertion that those miracles are a sufficient evidence of superhuman authority. In strictness, however, this is more than is necessary. In speaking of events of which we may be entitled to affirm that they indicate a superhuman power, it may be enough to assert, not universally, that they must be *always* beyond the reach of a mere man, but only that they must be beyond his reach in those circumstances in which they are known to have happened.

In all reasonings on the great miracle of the *internal* evidence, this distinction is of essential importance. Though it were to be granted that a perfect code of morality might possibly be framed by some well-educated philosopher, yet it may justly be stated to have been far beyond the power of a few unlettered fishermen of Galilee, to have invented, under those circumstances in which they were placed, that code, so pure and so sublime, which the Gospel

brings before our view. The internal evidence, therefore, of the Christian religion may be sufficient to prove its superhuman origin, even though it were granted that *in other circumstances* a mere man might have invented it.

To the *external* evidence we may also apply the same principle. Suppose that it may not be beyond natural possibility to invent an apparatus both of extreme levity, and of small bulk, which shall possess the power of propelling a man through the air, and which might be concealed about the body, or under a robe. It has been guessed by some theorists that such an invention may not improbably be one day achieved. But granting it achieved, we may still hold not the less firmly, that neither Elijah, nor Christ, in whose respective ages we may be sufficiently assured that no such power existed, or was known, could have availed themselves of it in their ascents into heaven. Or suppose that there really may exist in medicine certain hidden sympathies which may effect the resuscitation of a body really dead. If those sympathies could not have been known to our Saviour, the resurrection of Lazarus may be still a perfect miracle, or the exertion of an indubitably

superhuman power. Though man may possess, under some circumstances, any given degree of wisdom or power, it does not follow that he may also possess the same power under other and very different circumstances ; or that the same power under those different circumstances may not indicate a superhuman agency.

But though this be so, and though it may not always be impracticable to state the circumstances under which man cannot do that which he can do under more favourable circumstances, yet the stating of them must be often a matter of difficulty. They must be stated, no doubt, in the great question of the internal evidence. They are the very basis on which that evidence rests. And that question is properly also a question of miracles, it being the whole meaning of all those who contend for an internal evidence of the truth of Christianity, that they can produce, on the face of the religion itself, indications of which it may be affirmed that, under all circumstances, they argue the exercise of a superhuman power.

In the question before us, however, of what may be called *external* miracles, or of all those miracles which are addressed to the senses (a

question ordinarily disjoined from the internal evidence), this consideration of the distinction between those powers which man possesses under some circumstances, and those which he possesses in different circumstances, is a distinction which we may account a superfluous nicety. For the present purpose we may neglect it altogether, and may state universally that, to substantiate a revelation, a work must be proved to be superhuman absolutely, not merely superhuman in the given circumstances. The miracles of the Gospel can safely spare this concession, and we shall not need to retract it, till it can be *proved* that even the raising the dead, the giving of sight, and by a sudden act, to the blind, the ascending into heaven, and other miracles which the Gospel records, are not, universally, beyond the power of man.

II. I have now to prove, secondly, that no imaginable improvement of the powers of human invention or artifice can ever bring man a single step nearer to the performance of such miracles as those of the Scripture.

Here then I have to observe that however splendid may be our anticipations of the future progress of science, though we may readily ac-

knowledge that man may one day become equal to the performance of acts which, under present circumstances, would appear to indicate a superhuman power, yet all that we can anticipate of the progress of science in future must of course be in the analogy of its progress in time past. That progress has been always what Paley calls *tentative*: in the words of Bacon, it has been always *palpatio quædam*. Man's inventions have never leapt out at once to their final consequence and effect, but have always been prepared and preceded by numberless failures and unsuccessful experiments. But the miracles of the Gospel all succeeded at once, without failure, without error, without previous experiment:—and still more than all this, without any machinery, without any scientific instruments or apparatus.—For it is very material in this place to remark, that the new *powers* which have been acquired by science have been acquired only by the invention of better instruments, or of better methods of working. If we had not been aided by these advantages, we should scarcely have been advanced in *practical* science beyond the contemporaries of Moses or of Christ. Even in *theory* the perfection of our instruments has

done much for us. But for the invention of the telescope we might have known little more of astronomy than was known by Hipparchus, or by the ancient Chaldeans. But for that of the pump, we might have been ignorant at this day of all we know concerning the pressure of the atmosphere. In all arts of *practice* the case is still stronger : and to practice, not theory, it is our business to look, if we would attempt to find any parallels to the Gospel miracles, from which we may argue that those miracles may have been performed by human skill or empiricism.

In matters of practice it may, I believe, be affirmed universally, that *all* the accessions to human power, which have been acquired during the last eighteen, or I might say, the last thirty centuries, or during the longest period of which there are any traces in history, have been acquired solely by an improved method of working, or by means of the improvements which have been made in instruments and machinery. The physical powers of the human body and mind are in all ages very nearly the same. Jugglers and charlatans, who make a common trade of practising on, and deceiving, vulgar credulity, have probably been at all times nearly alike. At

all events we have no reason to suppose that the progress or the diffusion of knowledge contributes to increase *their* influence or ability. All they can do now they did quite as well in ancient Memphis or Babylon:—and if in the liberal arts, or in those connected with science the case is different, this arises only, as I have said, from improvements in method, or from the improvements introduced either by science, or accident, into all kinds of instruments or machinery. If the chemist have acquired new agents in chemistry, it is because they are furnished to him by his improved methods of analysis. If the modern surgeon extract the stone successfully, it is because his art has found a fit minister in the form and temper of the knife which he employs.

And so, if it were held that past improvements in medicine might render it a probable or a possible expectation that future improvements may even place it within man's power to resuscitate a body really dead, or to heal the most aggravated and rooted diseases.—Nothing can be vainer than to pretend any such analogies:—we may, I believe, assert with entire confidence that there are none such.—But, allowing them to exist, yet in all the facts on which they

are grounded there is always an indispensable condition mixed up, which discriminates them altogether from the Scripture miracles. Those past improvements have been made by method and process, and usually by the help of some scientific apparatus. The analogy is, therefore, that all future improvements will be made similarly by the aid of such methods and processes.

But the miracles of Scripture were performed without any process. "He spake, and it was done." "He blessed and brake, and the five thousand were fed with five barley loaves and two small fishes." And in those few cases in which some process was used, as in the anointing with clay the eyes of the man born blind, all these processes, though it may be exceedingly difficult to assign a reason why these in particular, or indeed why any, should have been used^a, are yet at all events such as cannot be imagined to have at all contributed to the effect produced. In the time of Daniel, or in that of Joshua, to traverse the air, or to walk at the bottom of the sea, would doubtless have been esteemed acts not less impossible, or less demanding a super-

^a See Note D. at the end of the volume.

human power, than for a man unarmed and bound like Daniel to restrain the rage of hungry lions, or than the act of Joshua in causing the sun to stand still. Yet we may now traverse the air in balloons, or descend in the diving-bell to the bottom of the sea. But still all these discoveries do not bring us the nearer to the power of performing such acts without instruments, or with only such instruments as are recorded to have been used in the performance of the Scripture miracles. Though the cataract may be removed by the art of the surgeon; though the potable gold which could restore youth to decrepitude were proved to have real, instead of fabulous, virtues; or though the galvanic battery could recal life to the dead; yet the giving of sight by anointing the eyes with spittle, or the calling up of Lazarus by a word from the tomb, are no less evidently the acts of a super-human agent, than they would have been, if blindness were still universally incurable, or if Volta and Galvani never had been born. It is quite plain, therefore, that though we were to indulge the wildest and most irrational reveries as to the future improvement of human science and art, we yet should not advance a step to-

wards the presumption that human art will ever be equal to the performance of any such works as the Scripture miracles. And hence we conclude that the Scripture miracles, if performed in the manner which is related, are acts of an indubitably superhuman power.

III. The only demur which can be possibly raised to this conclusion is, that these events may perhaps have happened *by chance*, or that they may have been only some unusual or extraordinary effects of some law, as it is called, or rather of some principle, of nature, rarely brought into operation. With *all* those laws, or with all those principles, we cannot affirm ourselves to be acquainted. The natural effects of some of their rarer combinations may, though not absolutely inconsistent with those laws by which we observe the world to be governed, yet be to us unprecedented : and these may be interpreted, it will be said, by superstition or fraud, into real miracles, and as such may acquire an undeserved reputation, and be regarded as vouchers of a superhuman authority.

The answer to this objection was to be the third and last head of this chapter, under which it was proposed to set forth the principles on

which we peremptorily exclude all such suppositions.

One part of the answer, or rather an answer which in itself might justly be regarded as complete and convincing, is that we are wholly ignorant of the existence of any law of nature, or natural principle, by which, without the intervention of some superhuman being, the dead can be restored to life, or by which most other of the Scripture miracles may have been performed. We have no presumption that there exists any such principle: there is no probability of it: it is a mere guess, for which, whether true or false, there is not any, even the least, foundation.

But besides this *negative*, we have also *positive* evidence, that the Scripture miracles could not have happened by chance. Let us leave it undetermined whether there be, or be not, beyond all experience, and beyond all detection, any principle of nature which can produce any such acts as those which the Scripture miracles purport to be. Yet still, at all events, the very extraordinary coincidence between the happening of any event, of a kind altogether strange and unheard of, and its happening under cir-

cumstances which would allow the apparent actor to claim it as an attestation of a divine authority, this coincidence also being observed to take place not once only, but in many instances, is itself an inconsistency with those laws of nature of which we may trace and know the existence. As such it constitutes a positive evidence that the agent affirms nothing but the truth, unless, as before, we can disprove his doctrines by showing them to be inconsistent with what we otherwise know*. If any act so very extraordinary is alleged to us, and we cannot show by something better than a blind guess, that it may by possibility be natural, or casual, we must confess the exercise of a superhuman power, and then all the rest follows of course.

It is here to be remarked, also, that the entire exclusion of chance, or of the operation of any occult law of nature, is eminently promoted by that immediate copula which has been observed to subsist, in many of the Scripture miracles, between the act of power performed and the doctrine which is affirmed on the credit of it. Concerning this copula, and the common

* P. 52, and the Preliminary Dissertation.

opinion, that in miracles alleged to sustain a divine revelation it is necessary that the doctrine be declared *first*, and the power confirmatory of it evidenced *afterwards*, I have already shown that this condition cannot be by any means indispensably necessary to substantiate the agent's superhuman authority^a.

But although thus not, perhaps, a matter of moment, the superhuman power in the act being admitted, yet this copula may still be of the greatest moment in the question whether the act itself be really an act of superhuman power, or not. How many most extraordinary things do happen by chance, or by that hidden regulation of Providence to which the name of chance is commonly given! Every man is witness, both in his own life, and in the lives of others, to combinations of circumstances very unusual and surprising, in which he sees not, however, any symptoms of the miraculous. A man may, by chance, throw seven with a pair of dice five hundred or a thousand times successively, and though we may be inclined to wonder, perhaps, at this extraordinary run of luck,

^a Preliminary Dissertation, Sect. III.

we should absolutely ridicule his pretending in consequence of it, to the possession of superhuman power or authority. But if he were *previously* to declare a mission from heaven, and *predict* his doing this act in attestation of it ;—we might suspect some trick, probably, as that the dice were loaded ;—we might be very reluctant to admit the evidence of the fact ;—we might remark the great difference between the character of an act like this, and those admirable characters of justice and mercy which are conspicuous in the Scripture miracles.—But admitting the fact, and coupling the chances against it with the extreme improbability of its taking place exactly at that time, at which it might be colourably alleged to support a claim of a nature so very extraordinary as that of a claim of divine revelation ;—I hardly know (so nearly in our apprehension do we naturally connect all extreme improbabilities with the strongest contradictions which we can conceive to take place in the ordinary course of nature or of experience), I hardly know that we could deny it to prove the interference or agency of a superhuman being.

One easy case to which these principles may

be applied, is the very common one in which men who have been possessed of the previous knowledge that an eclipse was to take place, have gained a false credit by pretending to foretel a supernatural darkness which was about to arise. We know nothing better than that no pretensions of this kind can ever deserve a single moment's attention : but granting for the argument's sake that such a prediction were verified, and that we could prove satisfactorily of the person predicting it, that he himself could neither have calculated the phenomenon, nor yet have possessed the means of availing himself of the calculations made by others, how greatly should we be startled by so remarkable a coincidence ?

Or let us take, for another case, the remarkable history of the attempt said to have been made by the emperor Julian to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The story is, that "when the work was begun, terrible balls of fire broke out from the foundations, and made the place inaccessible, and upon many repeated endeavours slew the workmen, so that, the fire never ceasing to rage whilst any attempt was made to go on with the work, the undertaking was laid

aside."^a On this it has been remarked, that the appearance of balls of fire is far from being an unequivocal proof of a miracle, and instances are alleged, some of them exceedingly similar to the story which is thus related of Julian, in which fire is said to have broke out from the earth, and to have occasioned the same sort of destruction^b. Who can say, therefore, that this eruption also at Jerusalem, supposing the accuracy of that relation of it which has come down to us, may not be attributable to natural causes, and that its coincidence with Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple may not by possibility have been merely casual?

To this I reply, that if, in Julian's attempt, there had been nothing to attract forcibly the attention; if it had seemed to originate in the mere desire to gain celebrity by the restoration of so ancient and splendid a building; if he had attempted the restoration of almost any other temple, excepting this temple, or perhaps that of Delphi, or one or two others; we might agree in attributing the interruption of the work to some such casual origin. But that in this

^a Jortin's Remarks, II. 322, 8vo. 1805.

^b Jortin, *ibid.* pp. 323, 324, 325.

particular case, in which an evident defiance appears to have been offered to the God of the Christians, and under circumstances in which we might even look out for his interposition; that, in a case like this, so very remarkable a coincidence between the defiance offered, and the instant confusion of it by the events which followed, can be regarded as a coincidence merely casual, scarcely any person, I presume, will seriously believe^a.

Granting the facts, therefore, in this history of Julian, it is wholly impossible to deny that we possess in it clear and incontrovertible proof of a miracle: and it is moreover plain that this whole proof is created by the existence in this case of that direct copula which is so frequently observed to subsist between the miracles and the doctrines of Scripture, the *rea limport* of which copula is here the point for our consideration. If the facts appealed to by the Scripture writers as miracles were not, as they were affirmed to be, truly miraculous, they must either have been impostures, or they must have been, as has before been intimated^a, some un-

^a Jortin, *ubi sup.* p. 326.

^b P. 65, head III.

usual or perhaps unprecedented effects of one or more of those unknown combinations of the active principles at work in the universe, which are seldom or never brought under our observation.

And here the circumstance that most, or many, of those miracles were performed subsequently to the doctrine revealed, and in direct and professed attestation of it, refutes immediately every such supposition. Supposing that Moses, on his declaring to Pharaoh that he had a divine commission to conduct the Israelites out of Egypt, had, instead of working some miracle on this occasion, only appealed to a miracle formerly performed, that miracle, I apprehend, if quite incontestable, might still have given him his alleged authority^a. But if Pharaoh had replied, that though he professed not to detect the precise fallacy of the pretension advanced, or the arts which had produced an effect apparently arising from the exertion of superhuman power, he must yet distrust the claim which was rested on it: that he could not

^a See Preliminary Dissertation, Sect. III.

but suspect that some well-planned artifice, the execution of which had turned out successfully, had suggested the hope of grounding credit on the event ; or that the accidental occurrence of some unaccountable fact had given occasion to the apparent actor to pretend a miracle ; I do not say that these objections would have been justly adequate to refute a claim such as was urged by Moses ; but yet assuredly they might excite a degree of suspicion which cannot attach under the real circumstances. For the miracles which Moses wrought before Pharaoh in express attestation of his divine commission, though we will suppose them no greater than those he might have claimed to have worked before at any remote or unconnected period, yet must have been incalculably less exposed to suspicion. They were worked before witnesses either apprehensive of imposture, or at all events able and prepared to detect it : and though we may suppose it possible that certain unknown principles may once in a century produce something so strange, that an adroit impostor may avail himself of the accident, to ground on it the claim of a divine commission,

yet that this accident should, as I have said ^a, take place so opportunely, we may well assert to be wholly incredible.—Such is the power of mere coincidence over the human mind : and so entirely exempted are the Scripture miracles from all suspicion of chance, by the mere strength, it may be said, of the chances in their favour.—That the principles which apply in this alleged case of Moses apply equally in the case of the other prophets, and apply most strongly in the case of our Saviour himself, it would be a mere waste of words to argue.

Of the various copulas or coincidences, which may be thus alleged to prove the miraculousness of many of those events which are in Scripture recorded as miracles, the connection which may be traced between those miracles and *prophecy*, is one of the most signal and obvious. It is a remarkable coincidence, that both miracles and prophecy conspire, even independently of each other, to prove the same religion. That both should be so strong, and strong in our case only, while all other pretensions to either the one proof or the other are evidently and admit-

^a See pp. 68, 69.

tedly false and feeble, is, in addition to all else, a strong *chance* in our favour.

But besides this conspiracy of the separate evidences, it has often been remarked as a strong feature in the proof of miracles, that with regard to some of them, besides the particular proof of the fact, we have clear proof also that they were predicted before-hand. Thus our Saviour's miracles are foretold in Isaiah^a; or if any one should account these predictions indefinite, yet the Jews, at all events (and this is the sole point of the case which for the present purpose it is at all necessary to establish), undoubtedly interpreted them to mean that miracles should be performed by the future Messiah^b. The strongest case of all is our Saviour's own prediction that he should rise again on the third day from the dead^c.

The connexion which in these cases, and others like these, may be proved to subsist between the miracle and the prediction, is, in point

^a Isaiah, xxix. 18, xxxv. 5, 6, lxi. 1.

^b Compare Matt. xi. 3, 4, xii. 23. 38, and John, vi. 14. 30, 31.

^c Matt. xii. 40, xvi. 24, xvii. 23, xx. 19. Mark, viii. 31, x. 34. Luke, ix. 22. John, ii. 19.

of fact, a consideration of so much weight to prove the miracle real, that some writers rest on it as the chief point on which the decisiveness of the Gospel miracles depends, and without which their reality might be open to question.

This, doubtless, is an error, is the common weakness of arguing on only one favourite side of a question. The reason why this coincidence has so strong an effect to *augment* the evidence for the reality of the miracle (the evidence arising from the completion of the prophecy is manifestly not here a case to be argued), is exactly the same reason which increases the strength of the evidence in all those cases in which the miracle and the doctrine are united by any other bond of connexion^a. The point is to exclude all accidental events from being urged as evidences of superhuman authority. This is done, equally, whether we exclude the surmise that the event might possibly have happened by chance, at that time exactly when some *unexpected* impostor might with most effect use it to colour his doctrine; or the similar surmise that that person on whom the prophecies had fixed

^a P. 66, &c.

the public expectation, should find by chance a colourable pretext for alleging it, or for alleging it at that time precisely which the prophecies had pointed out.

That these coincidences do meet in the cases alleged, and that they are also coincidences of extreme natural improbability, it can scarcely be necessary to explain in detail. But in estimating our evidence that the Scripture miracles were really those works which they pretended to be, it is surely the business of every candid enquirer to appreciate carefully what *chance* that may be, which at least refers the very strongest claim of miracles which has ever at any time been advanced in the world, not to some adventurer selected at random from the various pretenders to supernatural powers, who have in all ages sported with vulgar credulity, but to that CHRIST who was designated by a chain of prophecies not less singular than his miracles themselves, who was “the desire of all nations”^a, whom many now waited for as the “consolation of Israel”^b, *now*, in the very ripeness of that “steady opinion which had become current

^a Haggai, ii. 7.

^b Luke, ii. 25. 38.

throughout the whole East, that it was fated for Judea to attain supreme dominion.”^a What also is the *chance* which could so colour the pretext of a miraculous resurrection of Christ from the dead, as to establish the belief that such an event had taken place, not at any time which the actors in such an affair might have it in their power to select or pretend; but on the very day on which it was predicted to happen?

Every thing that can be replied to these questions is that the prediction itself may be supposed in this case to have worked out its own accomplishment, may possibly have inspired the artifice to conceive, and the courage to attempt, an imposture. But it could not have inspired the Jews with a disposition to receive the miracles of a meek and lowly prophet, who disappointed their hopes of national glory, nor to neglect those precautions which, if Christ had not indeed risen again, must necessarily have baffled all the hopes and designs of his dispirited and scattered disciples. On the contrary, it induced, and must have induced them, to watch

^a Suetonius in Vesp. So also Tacitus, Hist. V. 13.

the more strictly both Jesus and his disciples; to scrutinize the more narrowly that attestation, which could not be established but to the disgrace and downfall of all their own long cherished ambition. Miracles, under these circumstances, they were the *less* inclined to admit, because they knew previously how much was depending on them. Consequently the prediction must have rendered deceit the *less* practicable, and authorises us every way to conclude the *more* forcibly for the certain truth of the miracle.

To conclude :—the confidence which we may be allowed to feel concerning miracles from the mere *improbability*, as it has been shown in this chapter, of their being, though extraordinary, yet accidental events, may be further strengthened, perhaps, by the following consideration. Allow the conjecture that, in the extremity of our ill fortune, we may possibly be deceived by the turning up against us of one chance in a million : yet still, if we believe in God's power and providence, it must, I think, remain certain that his paternal benignity will always protect us against the error of that one chance. He,

we well know^a, protects us effectually against every trial, whether of a moral, or of an intellectual nature, which we should be unable to bear, or discern. And to suppose it possible that he could permit an impostor, in a matter involving the first interests of religion, to avail himself of evidence which, after the most rigid castigation, would be found to come short of absolute demonstration, only by a difference which may be justly called *infinitesimal*, may, I think, be accounted wholly unreasonable.

Hence it follows, clearly, that the Scripture miracles, if performed in the manner which is related, are certain evidences of superhuman power.

^a 1 Cor. x. 13.

CHAPTER II.

THAT WE HAVE SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF THESE MIRACLES HAVING BEEN PERFORMED, OR OF THEIR HAVING BEEN PERFORMED IN THE MANNER RELATED.

SECTION I.

OF THE DIRECT EVIDENCE.

WE here assume that the records of these miracles, which are handed down to us from the original teachers of our religion, are records on the fidelity of which we may safely depend ; that is, are records which give an accurate report of what was asserted by those original teachers. That the relations themselves are correct relations of fact : that the original relaters could not have been imposed upon to take common events for miracles, and could not have intended, or could not have been able, to impose on others, are points which must be *proved* in the present chapter. But that the accounts we have are substantially the same with those accounts which were transmitted

originally from the first teachers of our religion; and that forged or falsified documents of a nature so highly interesting and alarming to the strongest hopes and fears of mankind, cannot possibly have been imposed upon the world at any subsequent period, is a proposition which, however serious and important, would unnecessarily encumber a particular treatise on miracles. Nor is there any point, indeed, which may be more safely *assumed*.

What I have now to prove, therefore, is that, in the Scripture miracles, the matter of fact, the superhuman power exemplified, is a matter in which the relaters, who we may say are the Scriptural writers, could not have been imposed upon, and in which they could not have intended, or could not have been able, to impose upon others.

To prove this point, it will be necessary to select one or more examples of the Scripture miracles, and to inquire severally, in regard to each of these examples, into the foundation of that assent which we are compelled to give to the fact asserted of their having been really performed. The examples I shall select will be that of the pillar of fire and cloud which con-

ducted the Israelites throughout their journeys from Egypt; that of the restoration of the blind man to sight as it is recorded in the ninth chapter of St. John's Gospel; the resurrection of Lazarus, and our Saviour's own resurrection. If on any of these histories I enter more into detail than the reader's patience may be willing to think necessary, I must request him to consider that, in all testimonial evidence, it is the detail of circumstances which constitutes the proof; that transient wonders, or such as are seen but for a moment, are less convincing than such as are comparatively permanent; and that the reiterated testimony of even the same witnesses is less to be suspected than only a single assertion, not only because, if we believe them to be sincere, it proves their more habitual and settled conviction, but also, and principally, because it invites, and obtains, the longer and more attentive investigation and criticism, and challenges more strongly retort and objection.

First, of the miracle of the pillar of fire and cloud.

What we first read of this miraculous pillar is in the two last verses of the thirteenth chapter of Exodus, where it is said to have appeared as

a guide to the Israelites, on their way out of Egypt, and before the passage of the Red Sea. “ And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people.” And we read again in the following chapter*, that during the actual passage of the Red Sea which followed, “ the angel of God which went before the camp of Israel removed and went behind them : and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them ; and it came between the camp of the Egyptians, and the camp of Israel ; and it was a cloud and darkness *to them*, but it gave light by night *to these* : so that the one came not near the other all the night.”

What we read next is in Chap. xxxiii. vv. 9, 10, that during the sojourn which took place at Mount Sinai, “ it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar de-

* Ch. xiv. 19, 20.

scended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and *the Lord* talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle-door : and all the people rose up and worshipped." In Numbers, ix. 15—23, it is said that "on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, *namely* the tent of the testimony : and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was alway : the Lord covered it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the Children of Israel journeyed ; and in the place where the cloud abode, there the Children of Israel pitched their tents." ^a

All this is reiterated over and over again ; on the departure from Sinai ^b ; in the intercession at Kadesh ^c ; again, when the forty years had expired of the stay made in the wilderness, in the recapitulation which Moses before his death made to the people of the history of their journeyings, and of God's providences in their be-

^a Cf. Exod. xl. 34—38.

^b Numbers, x. 11, 12. 34.

^c Ibid. xiv. 14.

half^a; and is at least alluded to afterwards in the similar recapitulation by Joshua^b.

It is farther in evidence that this relation was credited during all subsequent periods of the Jewish history. We find in the Book of Psalms “In the day-time also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.”^c “He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar”^d. “He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night.”^e The prophet Nehemiah repeats at length the same particulars^f; and that the same history was received in the time of St. Paul is also evident from the first epistle to the Corinthians. “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”^g

This is the history; and it appears that this history was published originally among the very people who were said to be witnesses to the fact related^h; that it was published by them as true

^a Deut. i. 33. ^b Josh. xxiv. 7. ^c Ps. lxxviii. 14.

^d Ps. xcix. 7. ^e Ps. cv. 39.

^f Ch. ix. 12. 19. ^g Ch. x. 1.

^h “And know ye this day, for I speak not with your chil-

without the slightest distrust, and that it was received equally by their immediate descendants, and also by many successive generations. In truth, there is no record of any different history having been ever set up in opposition to it among the Jews.—But this being so, the conclusion is certain, that any history so received must have been so far true, as at least to have appeared as fact to the Israelites. For the present I say nothing as to whether the fact were miraculous. Some fact or other there must have been, on which the story is founded. Miracle or not, the whole people of the Jews could never have been cheated into a belief that, for forty years, “the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, neither the pillar of fire by night,” if this whole story were nothing but *pure invention*, and there were no colourable pretext for believing it. Neither is it possible that they could have been cheated into the reception of documents which stated the fact to be thus notorious, a fact connected with their most sacred institu-

dren which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did.” Deut. xi. 2, 7.

tions, if no such fact had been really credited, and if those institutions had some different origin^a.

But if this be certain, the sole remaining enquiry is, whether the narration be intended to signify that a really superhuman power was manifested : (if there was not, no miracle was performed :) and, if intended, whether it be clearly impossible that the narrator can have imposed an artifice on the spectators. It is, no doubt, my business to prove the affirmative of both these positions. I do not well know which of them is meant to be questioned by those sceptics concerning miracles, who quote from ancient writers several passages, which appear to them to relate similar facts. It is proved by those passages that the ancient Persians and Arabians used to carry fires before them to direct their march, of which the flame is said to have been the signal by night, and the smoke by day^b. Our best method will be to consider each question separately.

The first question is whether it be clearly in-

^a See Paley's Evidences, and Leslie's Short and Easy Method with the Deists.

^b See note E at the end of the volume.

tended by Moses that this was really a miraculous cloud, or whether he may not have intended merely to imply that a sacred fire, kindled, perhaps, on an altar^a, was carried before the Israelites as an auspicious precursor, during their journey.

But that Moses *intended* to represent this cloud as miraculous will be proved easily by looking a little into particulars.

In the first place, it is quite certain that the passage of the Red Sea, whether really a miraculous passage or not, he clearly intends to represent as miraculous. "Fear ye not," he says, "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you to-day. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."^b *This* great transaction, therefore, according to his description of it, sets out, professedly, as being miraculous. And so afterwards, v. 21, "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to go back,and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided."—It is impossible to ima-

^a See Curtius, iii. 3, and Von der Hardt as cited by Rosenmuller in note E at the end of the volume.

^b Exod. xiv. 13, 14.

gine that in these words no miracle is affirmed to take place. This miracle is affirmed also in many other parts of the narrative.

If part is miraculous, therefore, or if it be the clear intention of Moses to represent God's power as exerted visibly and specially to protect the Israelites in their passage through the Red Sea, this being one part of their journey from Egypt, it is easy to believe that he may intend to represent as also miraculous, another part of the same history, even though it were a part which if it stood alone, we might be inclined to explain, if possible, away. For though it is but natural that we should be inclined to explain away any relation of a miracle standing singly, which might be capable, even with some force put on language, of receiving a different, and, it may be said, more probable construction, yet the reception of one miracle removes at once all analogies which would incline us to view with any peculiar suspicion the affirmation of any other miracle connected with it. And hence it follows that as the passage of the Red Sea is clearly asserted by Moses to be miraculous, there can be no reason why we should attempt to distort out of its ordinary and most

natural construction that part of the history, in which he describes the appearance of this pillar of fire and of the cloud.

This being premised, is it, I ask, possible to imagine that where it is said in Exodus XIV. vv. 19 and 20, that “the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them: and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness *to them*, but it gave light by night *to these*, so that the one came not near the other all the night”—is it possible to imagine that all which is meant in these words is that, in the journeys of the Israelites, a fire was carried on a pole or altar before them, and that in the passage of the Red Sea this pole or altar was removed from the front into the rear of the army? Or was it the meaning of Moses to assert nothing miraculous, where he says afterwards that on finishing the tabernacle, “Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon,

and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”^a—If, in truth, it be held that the interpretation of Scripture can be anywhere subjected to principles of interpretation which shall teach us to see no assertion of a miracle in these passages, or in such others as these, we may rank at once that sacred book among the most unintelligible of all mysteries. Woolston’s jargon of the allegorical nature of miracles becomes sobriety compared with such notions as this: and the simplicity of the Pentateuch, which has been for so many ages to the Jews the manual both of their law, and of their religion, becomes the sport of a wild caprice of conjecture wholly inadmissible into rational criticism.

We have next to inquire whether it were possible for Moses to have imposed on the people any artifice as a miracle.

And here without dwelling on the powerful reasons we have^b for accounting Moses a most guileless writer, I say that it is impossible that, in a matter like this, any artifice could possibly have been successful. It is entirely impossible that in the whole multitude of the Jews there

^a Exod. xl. 34, 35.

^b See Shuckford’s Connection, Vol. iii. p. 302—330. ed. 1740.

should not have been sense to discover, or virtue to resist, any unfounded affirmation of such a miracle, thus mixing itself up with the most sacred doctrines of their religion. No such story could possibly, if an imposture, have acquired at any time an uncontradicted currency. It is also, I think, certain that if any surmise had transpired, that the story was an imposture, we should have found in the history itself some traces of such a surmise being entertained. It is a history which would at the least have recorded some *defence* of the miracle, if even by the factions which arose against Moses, the reality of it had been ever doubted or denied. It is also a history which proves that the Israelites were not led blindly by their great lawgiver. They were a rebellious people, always hankering after the idols of Egypt. They rebelled at Marah against the authority of Moses even within three days after that passage through the Red Sea, which I may here assume that they believed to be miraculous. The progeny of Korah lived to witness the future conquest of Palestine^a, the progeny of that Korah who, if

^a Shuckford, Vol. iii. 325.

Moses were an impostor, must have fallen a victim to the merest artifice and knavery.—Are we then to suppose that all these people could have been imposed upon to believe that a miraculous column of fire and cloud removed miraculously during the passage of the Red Sea from the front to the rear of the Hebrew army: that it was darkness to the Egyptians, and light to the Israelites: that a miraculous cloud covered afterwards the tabernacle, tarrying there for intervals even of a month or a year^a, and at intervals taken up, and passing on, and becoming stationary on the spot which it designated for pitching the tents? Is it for a moment credible, I say, that both friends and enemies, that a population of two or three millions of souls, that two generations for a space of forty years together, should have been impressed with the belief that this cloud was miraculous, if nothing miraculous had in truth taken place. Yet this we must believe, if we would resist the conviction that a real miracle did take place on this occasion.

Let us now from this Mosaic proceed to the Christian miracles, which it cannot be necessary,

^a Numbers, ix. 22.

however, to detail at so much length.—And first of the miracle recorded in John, Ch. ix.

Our account of this miracle is that as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. In a short conversation which ensued with his disciples on the cause which had occasioned this calamity, our Saviour declares the cause to have been, that the works of God should be made manifest in this blind man whom they saw ; and adds concerning himself, “ I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day : the night cometh, when no man can work.” That these expressions were plainly intended as a preface to the miracle which he was about to attempt to perform, and that they are a preface which must have rivetted his hearers’ attention, there is not any person, I suppose, who will for a moment dispute. “ When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay : and said unto him : Go wash in the pool of Siloam. He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”—This, no doubt, on the first view of it, is a great miracle. “ Since the world began, was it not heard that any man opened the eyes

of one that was born blind :” and though, as has been observed in the preceding chapter^a, it may be difficult to ascertain why the process described was used in the operation, yet it has never occurred, I believe, to any sceptic concerning miracles, that if this be an exact account of the process, that process can in the least negative the miracle.

The resurrection of Lazarus is related as follows.—Jesus, who had been abiding for some time beyond Jordan^b, returns, on hearing of the death of Lazarus, to Judea. He tells his disciples, before he sets out on his return, that he returns for the purpose of restoring him to life^c. They accompany him in his journey, though with very desponding apprehensions of the danger they would encounter by venturing so near to Jerusalem^d. On his arrival at Bethany, he says to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, that her brother shall rise again^e, and evidently excites in her mind an expectation of some very unusual or striking event^f. He sends for Mary, who immediately comes to him with several Jews

^a P. 63. ^b John, x. 40, xi. 6.

^c Ibid. xi. 11—15.

^d Ibid. vv. 8. 16. 18.

^e Ibid. v. 23.

^f Ibid. vv. 25—29.

who were comforting her^a, and with this assemblage he proceeds to the grave. "It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it."^b Lazarus had at this time been dead four days, and a short demur was made to the removing of the stone^c. But when it was removed, "Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go."^d That this too was a miracle, if performed as related, must beyond all doubt pass wholly unquestioned.

We now come to the miracle of our Saviour's own resurrection, which is declared to us in detail by all the evangelists. They all declare that he predicted his crucifixion, and that he should

^a John, xi. 31—33. 36. 45.

^b Ibid. v. 38.

^c Ibid. v. 39.

^d Ibid. vv. 41—44.

rise again on the third day from the dead^a. They all record his actual death on the cross, an event witnessed by intent and numerous spectators, and we are informed by St. Matthew, that, after his burial, the chief priests and Pharisees being aware of the prediction that after three days he would rise again, took their own precautions to baffle deceit, that they “went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch.”^b—It is declared to us farther, that on the third day, Christ did rise, as he had predicted, that on the morning of that day the grave was found empty^c, that the watch were bribed to say that the body was stolen^d, and that Jesus himself appeared at various times to his disciples, that he talked with them, ate with them, that he convinced their incredulity by showing them his hands, his feet, and his side^e: or, as the whole history is briefly recapitulated in the beginning of the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that “he showed himself alive

^a See the references, note ^c, p. 76.

^b Matt. xxvii. 66.

^c Matt. xxviii. 1—9. Mark, xvi. 4. Luke, xxiv. 1—12. 22—24. John, xx. 1—13.

^d Matt. xxviii. 15.

^e Luke, xxiv. 39.

after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of" the Apostles " forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."^a

The formal establishment of the certain truth of these miracles would divide into the same three branches, which, in the case of the Mosaic miracle of the pillar of fire and cloud, I thought might be ranked as separate heads of inquiry. It might be proved, first, that at least something took place, that at least there was a person who called himself Christ, and who performed certain acts in ancient Judea, and that the acts of this person, whether or no he worked miracles, that his doctrines, whether they be true or false, were the foundation of that religion which we profess. But it is so very unlikely that this will ever be contested ; if contested, we may apply to Christ so easily what has been said already of Moses ; and it is also so clear that Christ asserted himself to possess the power of miracles, and that the sacred historians bear testimony to the exercise of it, that all formal proof of such points as these would be thrown away.

It remains only to show, therefore, that the

^a Acts, i. 3.

facts related must have been performed in the manner related : that it is impossible to suppose that they can be essentially mis-stated to us in those evangelical records which we have received ; or that they could be anything else than real miracles.—Of the evangelical records, as in the former case of the Pentateuch, we, of course, assume either the absolute authenticity ; that is, their being the actual compositions of the immediate disciples and companions of Christ ; or at least that they were received in the very first ages of the church as a true representation of our Saviour's history.—Assuming this ; could these records have been received, could they have been allowed to subsist without any refutation of the miraculous facts which they relate, and which they relate not incidentally, but as their main subject and business, could this have been, unless those facts had been true, and incontrovertible ? The jet of these facts was to gain converts to a religion, which taught the Jew that he must unlearn all those prejudices which had wound themselves most intimately about his heart, and his religion ; prejudices which, like most men, he loved better than his religion itself, and which required him to embrace con-

tempt and persecution : which taught the Gentile, not a moral explication of the superstitions and fallacies of Gentile worship, a sort of philosophy he might, perhaps, have willingly received, but that he too must submit himself to the scandal of the cross.—The question I ask is whether persons so circumstanced could ever have been prevailed upon to believe *doubtful* facts, those facts carrying with them such practical consequences, and involving the admission, and even the zealous assertion, of doctrines so uninviting and perilous?

Or even could this happen, we are still but little advanced in accounting for the credit which these miracles obtained. Grant that *friends* may still have been made to the religion, on some unknown and incomprehensible principle, or rather in defiance of the strongest principles of our nature, and that the friends of the religion might have been naturally disposed to admit even on defective evidence the truth of the miracles on which it was said to depend.—Grant this of its *friends*. Where all this time were its *enemies*? In this great question were the Jews idle, or were they indifferent? Could the Scribes and Pharisees see a reformer of their

religion, a man who opposed their own construction of it, who censured their bigotry, and who, if such a feeling as disdain can be said to have entered into the humble character of our Saviour, seems to have disdained all their pretensions ; could they see such a man collect crowds of followers, could they know his doctrines to be subversive of their own, and yet not exert themselves, if he pretended miracles falsely, to put down the falsehood of a claim so prominent, a claim to which he must have owed his whole popularity ? If they did exert themselves to put down a false miracle, is it possible that their efforts could have failed of success ? Could a party possessed of all the power in the state, of all the influence of wealth and education, have been unable to prove, and to place on record, the clear proof of the falsehood and futility of a false assertion of fact which all their interests were so much concerned to refute ? Putting out of question the scriptural miracles, does the history of the world contain a single example of any false miracle having ever risen into credit in opposition to interests so strongly pledged to confute it ?

But the miracles of the Gospel were not even

denied. There is not a trace of any contradictory testimony, of any opposite or rival authority. All that the Jews, after having had eighteen centuries to make the best of their own story, can now say in opposition to the Gospel miracles, is to accumulate common place observations on the natural credulity of mankind, and on the ready belief of Heathens and Papists in miracles now universally held to be false^a. But any other version on any positive authority of the story which our own Gospels affirm, never yet has been, and of course never can be, produced. There is, perhaps, one exception, that of the report circulated among the Jews, that our Saviour's disciples came by night, and stole away his body out of the sepulchre, a report communicated to us in our own Gospel of St. Matthew. But this report is a mere subterfuge on the very face of it.

The only objection, which I can at all foresee to this argument, is that it may be said that the ancients, both Heathens and Jews, held opinions which may have prevented them from examining, with a sufficiently scrupulous care and at-

^a *Amica collatio cum erudito Judæo. Tertium scriptum Judæi. Quæst. 4. Num. 3.*

tention, any claims of miracles which were in those ages set up ; that it was their common belief that portents or prodigies, not less extraordinary than any miracle which can be imagined, might be wrought through the commerce which was possessed by magicians with evil demons, or with the occult powers of nature^a ; and that, consequently, not regarding these prodigies as decisive marks of the *divine* authority, they may have let them pass easily, and had no sufficient inducement to sift the evidence whether or no they had actually been performed. And thus, no doubt, Pharaoh, so long as the Egyptian magicians could “by their enchantments” do, or appear to do, the same things with Moses, did not suppose that either Moses, or the magicians, must have God’s aid in the performance of those works, but only that they performed them by some peculiar science, through the natural influence, perhaps, of the Planets and Elements, which they were enabled to avail themselves of by their magical learning^b.

But to this I answer that, though the statement be, no doubt, true, that such opinions

^a Shuckford, vol. ii. p. 356. ^b Ibid. p. 358.

were anciently prevalent, yet they did not prevail so as to bear out the inference which is in this objection sought to be grounded on them. How far they did prevail it is not easy to say. Many of the ancients, and many Christians also, even in ages not very remote from our own, have attributed to magic powers wholly unnatural, and which we, doubtless, should account superhuman. But the belief in magic has never damped the persuasion that miracles are at least one proof of a divine sanction; and, if so, can never have checked that jealous spirit of criticism with which all miracles which pretend to that sanction must be always regarded by any adverse party. Thus even Pharaoh, though a believer in magic, is said to have required of Moses and Aaron that they should "shew a miracle"^a by way of proof of their mission. He was open to the effect, therefore, of miraculous proof, if his hardened heart would have discerned its reality. And the magicians themselves, notwithstanding all their enchantments, confessed of one at least of Moses's miracles, that "this is the finger of God."^b Did their belief in magic make them confess this the more

^a Exod. vii. 9, 10.

^b Exod. viii. 19.

readily ; or would Moses have appealed, as he does appeal, to his miracles as decisive proofs of the divine sanction of his authority, if it were the persuasion of the people whom he addressed that miracles were no proof of a mission from God ?

I conclude it to be evident, therefore, that the miracles wrought by Moses must from the nature of the case have been subjected to a sufficiently strict examination. For the miracles of the Gospel we have similar evidence. Whatever opinions may have been held by the Jews of our Saviour's time with regard to the power of evil spirits to work miracles, or the possibility that God might permit an impostor to work them, we still know certainly that they did not account them as being by any means slight or trivial occurrences, and that they did account them as among those signs of his coming which were to be displayed by their expected Messiah^a.

In the relation given in the ninth chapter of St. John of the events which followed the giving of sight to the blind man, some of the Pharisees “ said, How can a man that is a sinner

^a John vii. 31.

do such miracles?"^a On the resurrection of Lazarus, "the chief priests and the Pharisees" gathered a council, and said: "What do we, for this man worketh many miracles^b: and it is related afterwards, that when "the people also met him, for that they had heard that he had done this miracle, the Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing: Behold the world is gone after him."^c Is this the conduct of men who would have admitted a miracle to pass unquestioned, or without accurate examination? Is it not the very same conduct with that of the assembly of rulers, who on occasion of the miracle wrought by Peter and John, are in the Acts of the Apostles said to have conferred on the subject, and from whom truth only could have extorted the confession, "that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it."^d

But now from this general view let us come down to particulars.

The first of those miracles which have been detailed above, is that of giving sight to the man

^a John ix. 16. ^b Ibid. xi. 47. ^c Ibid. xii. 18, 19.

^d Acts iv. 16.

blind from his birth. But let any man once look at the relation given by the evangelist, and then say whether any judicial investigation can ever have been conducted with a more jealous disposition to admit nothing but the most undeniable fact. "They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind."^a That he had been really born blind the Pharisees would not believe, until they had called and interrogated his parents. His parents, though fearful of irritating the Jews, could not but depose to the truth of the fact; and the man himself being again called and examined, confirmed and reiterated, though at a manifest risk^b, the same affirmation which he had previously made.

So in the case of Lazarus. Many Jews were, we know, present. "And some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, what do we, for this man doeth many miracles? If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."^c What did

^a John ix. 13.

^b Compare vv. 28 and 34.

^c John xi. 45—49.

they then ? The questions certainly are not specified which they put to the witnesses of this signal miracle : but if they did not know, or at least if they did not fear, that both the evidence of the actual death of Lazarus, and the standing evidence of his being now alive^a, could not be controverted, they never would have adopted the design of quashing the story by putting to death both Christ and Lazarus^b.

And now we come, lastly, to the great miracle of the resurrection of our blessed Saviour himself. Of this case, we know, first, that it had been clearly predicted^c. We also know further, that on the very ground of this prediction the chief priests and Pharisees applied to Pilate, urging him to command that the “sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away.”^d I ask whether it be possible that, after this prediction, a strict and accurate investigation of the fulfilment must not of necessity be expected to ensue ? That very investigation was, indeed, the precise object of the watch which was immediately set by the Pharisees.

^a John xii. 1, 2. 9.

^b Ch. xi. 53. and xii. 10, 11.

^c P. 76.

^d Matt. xxvii. 63—66.

What we know also is that this was the time of the full moon, when though there was night, yet there could be no darkness. Jerusalem overflowed with a great assemblage of people at this season of its chief annual festival^a. These were not circumstances in which any attempt would be made by the dispersed and timorous and despairing disciples to steal the body of their crucified Lord. They had indeed “hoped that this had been he who should have redeemed Israel.” But their hopes had perished with him, at least for the time.

Waiving this, however, and waiving the utter improbability that a guard of sixty soldiers, in a case pre-eminently important, and in defiance of the penalty, the penalty of death, inflicted on such negligence by the Roman military laws, should at once fall asleep ;—waiving all this,—is it not utterly incredible that, if the body had been really stolen, if this only story set up against the resurrection had any the least claim to credit, the chief priests and Pharisees should not have brought it to proof, should not have brought the negligent soldiers to the condign punishment of their negligence, though it were

^a Horne's *Introduct.* i. 306.

only to prove that they *were* thus negligent as was asserted. When “fifty days after the death of Jesus Christ the apostles shewed themselves in Jerusalem, and there testified that they had seen him risen from the dead, why did not the Sanhedrin apprehend them, and make them confess how all things had happened? Why did they not confront them with the watch? Why did they not imprison them till they had made them confess what was become of the body, as also every other circumstance of the imposture?”^a

And so also, afterwards, when the apostles were brought before them on the charge of preaching Jesus and the resurrection^b. The conduct of the Pharisees is here in all respects similar to their conduct as recorded in the ninth chapter of St. John, on the miracle of giving sight to the blind. They could not in that case deny the miracle, but said, “Give God the glory, for as for this man, we know that he is a sinner.” And so in this case they cannot deny the resurrection, but only “straitly command the apostles that they should not preach in this name.” Could they be such

^a Horne's Introd. i. 308.

^b Acts iv. and v.

bunglers as to act in this way, if they had in their hands proof of imposture? If it had been an imposture, could they have failed to have proof of it?—Thus unequivocal is the whole evidence which we possess, that the Scripture miracles were performed as related, unequivocal because they attest a religion to which no conversions could possibly have been made, except on the irresistible evidence of their truth; unequivocal also, because even setting aside the weight of all those unprejudiced conversions, no contrary evidence was produced by its adversaries.

This, if I mistake not, is the plain and positive statement of that direct evidence of the truth of miracles which we possess. We assume, as established in the general evidence of our religion, that the accounts which we possess of the Jewish and Christian miracles were originally published at the times and places asserted. We prove both from history, and from the nature of the case, that these accounts were not, that these accounts could not be, suffered to pass without examination. We observe also, that they are accounts of matters of fact in which the witnesses could not possi-

bly have been deceived. It is incredible that the Jews should have accepted from Moses a history purporting that they and their fathers, the very individuals who must have seen many of the miracles, and must have had opportunities of being informed of all of them by eye witnesses, had been for forty years under a miraculous guidance, had seen the Red Sea divided miraculously, had been fed by manna, had been preceded in their journeys by a miraculous pillar of fire and cloud, if they did not know that these assertions were true. It is equally incredible that the sacred historians of Christianity should have recorded the miracle of giving sight to the blind, with all the particulars of that miracle which they have preserved ; should have recorded the miracles of Christ's walking on the sea, of the resurrection of Lazarus, and of Christ's own resurrection ; and should have been able to procure the admission of these records as records of facts which had actually taken place, unless they stood on evidence justly indisputable. The miracles are facts, facts cognizable by the senses, and in which it is impossible that the senses of the witnesses could have been deceived by

the most adroit impostor. But it is still less possible that for the sake of imposing on others, they should have invented histories of facts which never took place ; and for the sake of accrediting which they consented to forsake, at least in the case of the Christian witnesses, all the guidance of the common principles of our nature, and to expose themselves to contempt, persecution, and death.

What could they gain by it ? This unanswerable question appeals to a principle of human nature so universal, that, in cases where we speak of a sufficient number of witnesses, we may be entirely certain that we may depend absolutely on their evidence, if we can prove that they may lose much, that they can gain nothing, by giving it. The conduct of individuals will no doubt sometimes furnish us with remarkable exceptions to general rules. It may not be easy to assign the motives of all persons who have endeavoured singly to practise on vulgar credulity. But life and tranquillity, conscience and interest, have never been sacrificed by bodies of men to the furtherance of any imposture. Christ's first disciples also, if they could have done this, must have

done it without any hope of succeeding. For, though success has, no doubt, rewarded in fact their affirmations of the miracles which they witnessed or performed, yet it is altogether certain that if they had not been persuaded of the truth of the affirmations they made, they could not possibly have expected success. In one word, if we thus prove of the disciples, both that they asserted the miracles, and that they had every thing to lose, and nothing to gain, by asserting them, this position, if we also couple it with the position that they could not mistake those matters of fact which they affirmed to have seen, is a complete evidence of the truth of the miracles.

So entirely incontrovertible as it appears to me, is this conclusion, that it may be almost a weakening of its strength to add farther, what is, however, necessary to a full view of the whole case, that not only was the evidence borne by the Apostles, borne under circumstances, in which the evidence of any man placed in the same circumstances would have been entitled to credit, but that it is also the evidence of men of guileless hearts and simple characters, of men who not only could have no motive to de-

ceive, but who, if any men, may be well regarded as inaccessible to all those insincere and fraudulent motives which, in any imaginable case, urge men to deception.

This may be a sufficient outline of the plain evidence which we possess, on direct historical testimony, for the truth of the miracles which are recorded in Scripture.

SECTION II.

OF THE AUXILIARY EVIDENCE, AND FIRST OF THE NUMBER OF THE MIRACLES.

IN the preceding Section I have stated an outline of the direct proof of some of the particular miracles recorded in Scripture. But still there are many circumstances, and these of no trifling importance, which it is necessary to enumerate before we can appreciate the full force of all the particular parts of the proof. I may be permitted to call these circumstances the *auxiliary* evidence; that is, auxiliary to the proof of miracles having been performed, not to that evidence of the truth of our religion which it may possess independently of the performance of miracles, the question of miracles being the only part of the evidences into which it is the purpose of this treatise to enter.

I. The first head which I shall here take up for consideration, is that of the great number of the miracles which were performed, a consideration which I shall show to be of material im-

portance to strengthen the proof of the particular miracles^a.

II. I shall then speak of the evidence from the great strength of that *impression* which will be shown to have been made on the original witnesses; and the perfect fulness of that *conviction* which they entertained^b.

III. I shall then show that the witnesses were good witnesses, or to be depended on, and not liable to be at all discredited as party witnesses, or as subject under all circumstances to the charge of credulity^c.

IV. The next point will be to prove that the whole strength of the evidence is come down to us unimpaired from its original, and not lessened by the lapse of time which has taken place since the miracles were actually performed^d.

V. I shall, lastly, recapitulate all these arguments and conclusions, exhibit the *certainty* of the moral force with which they conclude; and the farther confirmation which all this evidence derives from the inherent probability of the doctrine itself^e.

^a This will be the subject of the present Section.

^b Sect. III. ^c Sect. IV. ^d Sect. V. ^e Sect. VI.

First, of the number of the miracles. However incontrovertible the evidence of any particular miracle, God has not allowed us to repose the credit of miracles altogether on the particular evidence of one miracle only, or of a few miracles. It is plain from what has been said in Section III. of the preliminary discourse prefixed to this treatise, that a single miracle, if sufficiently proved, may establish the validity of all other miracles which are affirmed or asserted by the same agent, unless we can show that he must exceed his commission. Thus the one miracle of the pillar of fire and cloud, proved, as I apprehend it to be, beyond suspicion, proves all the miracles which Moses wrought before Pharaoh, proves the miraculousness of the passage of the Red Sea, proves the miracle of giving the Law from Sinai, proves the miraculousness of the punishment of Korah, and of every thing else which is related by Moses as miraculous. But then too, on the other hand, every particular proof of the real performance of *these* miracles reflects in the same manner on the particular evidence of *that* miracle. And this must be the case also, even though the specific proof of the miracles may in particular

cases be somewhat tinged with suspicion. I do not mean by this observation to throw suspicion on any one of them ; but only to observe that this is a case in which a number of histories which converge to one point (that point being here the miraculous attestation given by the Almighty to the mission of Moses), derive from their very number a greater strength and importance than that which we might be entitled to claim for them singly.

For, first, it is *probable* that if God sanction a messenger, he will commission him to perform more than one miracle. We can hardly imagine that any messenger from heaven should mix familiarly as Christ and Moses did with mankind, and that *many* occasions shou'd not arise in which it would be proper and, I may say, natural, for him to exercise that power of miracles which we suppose confided to him. Every messenger, therefore, of whom it is affirmed that he performs many miracles, must appear to come to us with a more probable story than a messenger who is said to perform only one.

But the principal reason, why the evidence of one miracle is essentially confirmed by the evidence of another, is, that though we were to

suppose it possible that one miraculous story, for example the miracle of the passage of the Red Sea, or one of the miracles worked by Moses before Pharaoh, may have gained credit through some mistake or imposture, yet we cannot imagine this to have been the case in numerous instances. There are very many chances against the success of any one imposture of this kind. There does not exist, indeed, in the whole compass of history, any one instance of a forged or falsified miracle, which is now received without much doubt and suspicion ; unless indeed the sceptic affirm that the Scripture miracles are an imposture, thus taking for granted what it is his business to prove.

But the chances against the success of *many* impostures, each of them an imposture in matter of fact, and all of them, it is manifest, vouched far more strongly than any other claim of miracles set up any where, multiply, of course, in a most decisive progression. In truth, some of those miracles which are commonly considered as being the best evidenced, owe much of their strength to their possessing those qualities which are thus found to confer a multiplied strength on every re-iterated claim of miracles. Thus in

the miracle of the pillar of fire and cloud. I know not that even if it had lasted but a day, it could have been entitled with justice a *transient* miracle. But, continued as it was during a period of forty years, it constitutes in itself a *series* of miracles, not the less strongly, but rather the more strongly evidenced, because similar in appearance or kind. And the case is the same with regard to the miraculous manna with which the Israelites were so long fed in the wilderness; and with regard to the evidence of the resurrection of our Saviour, who was seen of his disciples forty days.

Nor is it any objection to this, it is indeed, only what we might have expected, that some of the miracles which are recorded in Scripture would, if taken by themselves in those accounts which we have of them, exhibit a less evidence than those which I have selected, of really indicating a superhuman agency. In some diseases, as in some cases of palsy, it may not be easy to deny to the strength of the imagination, or of an ardent faith in a teacher's divine authority, the power of working cures so very extraordinary, that if the cures of this kind which are recorded in the Gospel had stood singly, unaccompanied

by others of a more incontestable kind, I know not that we could have laid much stress on them. But coupled, as these cases are coupled in the Gospel, with acts of a power indisputably superhuman, the superhuman power which exists indisputably in the one class is a sufficient proof under all circumstances of the superhuman agency which is asserted in the other. And though these cures thus add nothing, directly, to the actual evidence of superhuman power, yet when that evidence is once completed they add much to the probability of the religion, inasmuch as it is probable that a divine teacher would have other reasons for working miracles, besides that of urging them as the evidence of his authority. Thus it has often been justly observed of the Gospel miracles, that they are manifestly not solely intended to authenticate the mission, but that they are also intended to illustrate the character of Christ, and to give just notions of the nature of his religion.

Besides this also, it is a highly reasonable conclusion that if a power of working miracles be vested in any person, it will, in all probability, not only be exerted in *many* instances, not only in some instances of which the particular evi-

dence may not come to us in a very satisfactory shape ; but also that it will be sometimes exerted on what may appear to us trifling occasions. It may probably be given for one or more principal ends ; and yet, *being given*, may, like many natural agents, be employed for others which are very subordinate. To adopt a comparison from human art or contrivance,—it would be highly ridiculous to erect a steam engine for the mere purpose of opening and shutting a valve : but the engine being erected is very wisely employed both for this, and for many other purposes which, comparatively speaking, are of very little significance.

SECTION III.

OF THE EVIDENCE FROM THE IMPRESSION MADE ON THE ORIGINAL WITNESSES ; AND THE FULNESS OF THAT CONVICTION WHICH THEY ENTERTAINED.

I. It was shown in the last section that the great number of the miracles is a point of much strength to prove their real performance, and not at all weakened, although some of the miracles are of a nature which might be suspected if they stood by themselves. I now propose to show farther, that though, in our accounts of some of those miracles, which are in themselves of the most incontrovertible nature, we find no enumeration of those conditions which are undoubtedly requisite to prove the exertion of a really superhuman power, yet in most of these cases we still possess a sufficient evidence of it in the *impression* which we know was made on the witnesses.

This *impression* appears to me the important part of the business, the important part of the evidence which we possess that the power exerted was really superhuman. The circumstances may be in all cases, or almost all, the

proof whether an act be superhuman or not: as, in the Gospel miracles, the giving of sight to the blind, and the restoration of Lazarus to life, are proved to be miracles by the circumstances of each case, the eyes being in the one case anointed only with clay, Lazarus, in the other case, being restored to life by a word. If our Saviour had couched the eyes in the one case, and in the other case poured a medicine down the throat of a man who, for anything we could know to the contrary, might have been dead only in appearance, we should demur to the evidence of the superhuman act.

But then though certainly on some accounts satisfactory, it is not indispensable that these circumstances should be related. If the thing done be what we know may be done by human art, or by a religious impostor, aided by the strength of a deluded imagination, we forbear our assent unless a *known* deity be seen or proved to exert his authority. But if, on the contrary, it be sufficiently evidenced to us by the affirmation or testimony of unimpeachable witnesses, that the thing done is a thing which art cannot do, and in which the imagination cannot possibly be deluded, we conclude on the credit

of the knowledge and the integrity which those witnesses must be proved to possess, that the performance is real, that they have seen enough to prove that the thing done is really the super-human work which it is asserted to be, and not a mere imitation of, or pretension to it. If a person on whose judgment we can thoroughly depend were to tell us that he had seen any phænomenon, we should take it for granted that he had not failed to observe its real possession of all those conditions which, he must know, are necessary to constitute that phænomenon. And so if a fact, in which they cannot mistake, be vouched to be a miracle by a sufficient number of witnesses, we cannot doubt but that it must possess those conditions which are necessary to constitute a real miracle. Provided that the witnesses must have sufficiently known those conditions, it is not indispensable that they should specify any one of them^a.

Thus in the case of the raising of Jairus's daughter^b, we have no detailed evidence that the child was really dead. No one circumstance is related which can serve to discriminate be-

^a See farther on this subject, Chap. iv.

^b Matt. ix. 18. Mark v. 22. Luke viii. 41. and seqq.

tween the state in which she was found by our Saviour, and a state of trance, or of mere *coma*, or sleep. But we know that the spectators, of whom it is not to be imagined, but that they could discern whether the indications of death were absolutely certain, or only fallacious, were themselves entirely convinced of its certainty. Their convictions, therefore, may be a sure basis of ours, though we know not one of the symptoms which they observed.

That this is so, in this case, cannot be doubted. But we must extend the same principle also to all relations of miracles which may be affirmed even in the most general terms, supposing them to possess otherwise the same conditions of credibility. Thus, where our Saviour says to the disciples of John the Baptist, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up :"^a—if we assume, as I think we reasonably may, that John's disciples returned to their master convinced of the truth of these miracles, it appears to me that though

^a Matt. xi. 4, 5. Cf. Luke, vii. 21.

no particulars of them are recorded, we have yet complete evidence of their real performance.

I do not say that we have the *same* evidence of the performance of these miracles which we have of the miracle of raising Jairus's daughter, of the miracle of restoring the blind man to sight, or of the cardinal miracle of our Saviour's resurrection. We have not the same evidence for the following reason; that we are not so sure of John the Baptist's disciples, that they may not have been *prone* to believe our Saviour's miracles, as we are sure that there was no proneness of this sort among the Scribes and Pharisees; of whom we have it in evidence that they could not deny the real performance of those miracles of which *they* were witnesses. We cannot be so sure, therefore, that the disciples of John must have subjected to a rigid examination the miracles to which our Saviour appealed in their presence. We do know, indeed, that even in the age of the Apostles there arose a heresy of John the Baptist's disciples, who set up the authority of the Baptist against Christ^a. If the disciples who were sent by John to our

^a Marsh's Michaelis, Vol. III. Chap. vii. Sects. 4 and 5.

Saviour were persons infected with this disposition, we cannot doubt but that they would jealously scrutinize the evidence of the miracles thus laid before them. We can scarcely be *sure*, however, that this was their disposition, though we have ground to *conjecture* that they were not wholly well pleased to see the pretensions of their own master surpassed by the power and dignity of a far greater prophet. Their testimony, therefore, is not the highest possible. We cannot affirm it to be that of unwilling witnesses.

But still their testimony, though not unwilling, may be unimpeachable. If it stood alone, I can discern no reason for questioning it, except that in a revelation which rests its evidence on miracles, we naturally expect that at least some of these miracles should be detailed at length in the records of the revelation. That God should so work them, and the detail of none of them be preserved, that an historian, the whole value of whose history depends on the truth of certain events recorded in it, should fail to particularize at least some of those events, would strike us at first glance as being a great incongruity. But then since some miracles *are*

fully detailed, this objection to admit the evidence of the other miracles falls at once to the ground. Nor is this a mere proving of the real performance of those miracles, which, as in the case of those worked before John the Baptist's disciples, are related to us only generally, or in the gross, on the authority of those miracles which are fully detailed. The proof is in both cases independent and complete. The mention of the detailed miracles is here introduced, not in the least for the sake of proving the others, but only to disprove an hypothetical objection, that objection being that none are detailed.

II. This statement of the importance of the impression made on the witnesses leads me now to another and a farther proof of the real performance of the Scripture miracles. It has been proved, that the facts are such as could not be mistaken; it has been proved to be contrary to all the principles of human nature to suspect the witnesses of wilful fraud or mis-statement; and it has also been proved that we have their valid testimony, not only in the cases which they have particularly detailed, but in those also which they have stated generally, or in gross. But, in farther corroboration of these positions, we have

now to allege also the full measure of that *conviction*, which we can prove to have been impressed on the original authors, or relaters of those accounts. It is easy to prove of them from those accounts themselves that they were convinced so thoroughly, that the truth of the miracles became their most rooted and settled persuasion, became no less intimately knit and grafted into their minds, than the truth of other facts which they were most firmly assured of.

I conceive this observation to be of great importance. *Assent* is one thing, *conviction* another. It is a very different thing for a man to be persuaded so as to have his faith and practice inclined by the evidence, or to make a deposition that he believes the facts to be true; and for him to be so convinced as to retain no doubt or misgiving whether his conviction may not be erroneous.

I also apprehend that in all cases whatever, in which any doubt may be urged as to the truth of a fact, or as to its possessing those conditions which determine it to be in reality that fact which it purports to be, I apprehend that, in all these cases, the worth of the affirmation of any honest witness is always in proportion to

the strength of the conviction with which *that same witness* delivers his testimony. Suppose the case of a man who has been stabbed in a quarrel, and who dies a few days after receiving the wound. The surgeon who attended him may be merely inclined to *believe* that the wound inflicted was the cause of his death ; or he may *know* it to have been that cause with the fullest certainty. The measure of his conviction is here the sole measure of the evidence.

Or suppose that an eruption of some volcano takes place. We credit the account of the attendant phænomena which may be given to us by any particular witness, in the exact proportion in which he is sure of his own accuracy. We may, indeed, hold that the mere *opinion* of a philosopher, that he was not mistaken in what he *thinks* that he saw, may deserve in some cases a greater credit than the most positive affirmation of the same fact which is made to us by only an ignorant peasant. But this is only on the maxim that whatever is received must always be received according to the receiver's capacity. It is still true that the credit which we repose in each witness is exactly in proportion to the degree of conviction which we sup-

pose him, or which we may be able to prove him, to feel.

The value of this conviction, as one of the ingredients of evidence, is, moreover, the greater in all *novel* cases, such as are cases of miracles, because the memory can receive less or no aid in such cases from that natural analogy and connexion, which, in the ordinary course of human affairs, subsists between one event and another. For this reason, among others, every unprejudiced witness of any miracle will be more inclined to distrust the accuracy of his recollection of the miraculous facts which he may have even *seen* to take place, than he would distrust his recollection with regard to common facts. The judge, whose business it is to weigh the evidence which that witness delivers, will distrust still more that distrustful recollection. But then, on the other hand, we may, in all cases of miracles, rely on the *conviction* of an unprejudiced witness as indicating a much more attentive and minute observation, than that which he might have given to any ordinary event.

And from this it even follows, that, if we abstract from the case, as in the instance of the

Scripture miracles, we justly may abstract from it, all objection to receive a miraculous history on the ground of its being contrary to the established analogy which we observe to take place in human affairs, we may have a *stronger* evidence for the truth of a miracle, than for the truth of any common fact which may be vouched by equal authority. Say that there is nothing improbable in the supposition that our Saviour may have possessed the power of working miracles. We have then, for example, a *stronger* evidence of the exact accuracy of the report which we have received of his raising of Lazarus, than we have of the fact that on his arrival at Bethany, "Martha met him while Mary sat in the house."^a This last is a fact, indeed, which it would be idle to doubt; but it is a comparatively unimportant fact, in their recollections of which the most credible witnesses might vary, or might disagree. To the circumstances of the *miracle* they could not have been inattentive. Their conviction of the truth of these circumstances is therefore in itself a stronger evidence than the conviction they felt

^a John, xi. 20.

of the truth of the other fact.—From all these considerations it is abundantly evident, that the entire conviction which the sacred writers exhibit of the unquestionable truth of those miracles which they record, is a considerable proof of the exact accuracy of their observation.

It is now our business to prove that they felt that conviction. In order to prove this, our direct and plain course is to take the evidence given of it by the first disciples of Christ, in renouncing their prejudices, in becoming converts to his doctrine, in devoting themselves both in life and death to the prosecution of it. The historians themselves were among these disciples ; they themselves gave all these proofs of their own conviction. Or, even if it were not so, though we had no proof before us that the writers of the New Testament were identically the personal disciples of Christ, and the eye-witnesses of his miracles, yet the mere fact that persons professing themselves to have been eye-witnesses of those miracles did renounce their Jewish prejudices, did become converts to Christ's doctrine, did devote themselves, as we know they did, to the promotion of it, is a complete proof (and not in any degree the less

strong, though we should suppose that those witnesses were not themselves the historians), that those witnesses gave more than a mere assent, or a mere opinion, that they gave the firmest possible conviction of mind to the truth or real performance of those miracles which they professed to believe^a.

Of the firm conviction then of our Saviour's disciples we have proof incontestable in the known history of our religion. But we have an equal proof also in the sacred writings themselves of the conviction plainly entertained by the writers. It is perhaps impossible, even to the most consummate artifice, ever to *invent* or to *impose on mankind* any long or ramified history, of which the falsehood shall not betray itself. There will either be found in the facts which it relates some fatal inconsistency with one another, or with some other facts of un-

^a That in estimating the proof of the real performance of the Christian miracles, their having been thus *acted on* is a matter of first importance, is perhaps the leading principle of Paley's work on the Evidences. See his enunciation of Proposition 1. Part i. (cited in Note P at the end of the volume). See also Chap. 1. Part i., and also Chap. 1. Part ii. Subdivision 6.

doubted authority ; or there will be an apparent fraud in the very structure of the narration.

But I think it may be affirmed that it is still more impossible that the narrator of any events which he *believes*, should not betray in the course of his narrative evident symptoms of any doubt which may still adhere to him as to the *certain* truth of it. Thus in most parties, whether religious or political. We see in most of them an evident solicitude, and this among persons very conscientiously inclined to the party which they have adopted, and to which they adhere, to make the most of all their arguments, to put forward strongly all the facts in their favour. This is often owing to some lurking apprehension that their arguments may not be quite so cogent, nor their facts quite so incontrovertible, as they might wish or as indeed they believe them to be. Thus a vehement speech invites a suspicion that the speaker's passions are working him up to a conclusion, in which he is sincere, perhaps, but in which he would be more calmly sincere, if he did not feel concerning it some degree of distrust. A very artificial getting up of a story makes us think that something may be said to disprove it. And this not

only because we are in such cases put on our guard by observing practices which we know are often adopted for the purpose of veiling wilful deceit, but also because all partial convictions dispose men unconsciously to use rhetorical arts in order to stifle in their own minds all feeling of doubt.

But how different from all this is all the language of Scripture. In every page of that holy book we may easily find perpetual indications of the thorough conviction felt by the writers. Where it is said of our Saviour that when he was come into his own country, "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief"^a; is this the language of men who possibly might conceive that the evidence of the mighty works done elsewhere could be rejected on inquiry by any rational mind? Where it is said that after Jesus had rebuked a devil, "then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?"^b, is it in the least credible that this can have been the language of men who possessed only a doubtful belief of our Saviour's own miraculous powers?

^a Matt. xiii. 58.

^b Ibid. xvii. 18, 19.

It moreover appears to me, that in some of those miracles which the Scripture historians have related more generally, and without entering, or without entering much, into particulars^a, as for instance in the miracle of raising Jairus's daughter, they would certainly, if any shade of doubt had mixed with their conviction, have put forward all the strongest circumstances, would sedulously have endeavoured to impress on their writings that full proof of their accuracy which they were themselves *trying* to feel. But instead of doing this, they rather take it for granted that at least no Christian ever felt the least doubt of the reality of the miracles which our Saviour performed. This is doubtless an argument of the conviction of the witnesses ;—as a contrary method or turn of recital is always apparent in every struggle to believe against some latent consciousness or suspicion of error. Thus in the tale related to us by Lord Herbert of Cherbury^b. He was manifestly desirous to support in his own mind the belief of the performance of a real miracle. He details accordingly some most insignificant

^a See p. 128 and seqq.

^b See note F at the end of the volume.

circumstances, equally insignificant whether real or imaginary, with the evident desire to lay as much stress on them as possible. In the remarkable story which is told by Sir Kenelm Digby^a of the cure of wounds, by what he calls powder of sympathy ; and which, if it was not meant to be considered a miracle (it must have been attributed at the time probably to natural magic), yet evidently requires a proof similar to that of miracles, and cannot but have been suspected by the writer himself ; we have a similar study to put the evidence of it forward. And this is the case, indeed, with regard to *all* doubtful miracles. It was eminently the case with regard to the miracles of the Abbé Paris^b. It was what Tacitus^c and Cardinal de Retz^d would have done, if they had believed, and had concerned themselves to prove, the reality of the miracle said to have been performed by Vespa-

^a Discours touchant la Guérison des Playes par la Poudre de Sympathie. Paris, 8vo. 1658. p. 6—19.

^b See Douglas's Criterion. Leland's Deistical Writers, Vol. I. Letter xix. and Paley's Evidences, Part I. Prop. ii. Ch. 2.

^c Hist. lib. iv. cap. 81. cited by Paley, *ibid*.

^d Liv. iv. A.D. 1654. Paley, *ibid*.

sian, or that of the restoration of a man's lost limb at Saragossa.

To *prove* the miracles also, or at least to impress on the reader the fulness of the evidence by which they are proved, this would, doubtless, be the right method. But it is a method, which, as far as it is to be accounted mere *method*, is not calculated to prove the writer's conviction. *This* is to be proved, not by the proof of the miracles, but by our seeing them regarded as wholly unquestionable. And it is worthy of remark that in the Scripture miracles, while the detail of some is so particularly brought before us, that we see the very circumstances which proved their reality, others are thus related in a more general way, and so as to indicate the natural and unaffected conviction which was felt by the original witnesses.

But further, this proof of the entire conviction which was felt by the witnesses of our Saviour's miracles, namely, the proof derived from the manifest sincerity which is indicated in the tone of their actual narrative, extends itself far beyond the actual narrative, and is, perhaps, even more visible in many incidental allusions, which evidently demonstrate both the conviction of

the writers, and also the notoriety of the facts alluded to, or that they were regarded by the persons to whom the writers address themselves as being facts wholly unquestionable.

In every history, in all discussion or controversy, there must always be much of this kind of allusion to those facts or matters which are assumed as incontestable, and as the basis of the exposition or argument. Every fact, or rather every series of facts, on which much *turns* that is of importance, must always be spoken of in some compendious method. We are naturally desirous to get rid of the labour of detailing repeatedly what will be sufficiently understood, if stated only in brief. In this principle, as is well known, originate all those compendious forms of expression which the theory of language traces and explains. Thus we speak compendiously of the wars of Athens and Sparta, of the battles of Salamis and Plataea, as of single facts, though no doubt each of them including a very great number of particular circumstances.

On the very same principle also we are led on to *allusion*, and this particularly in matters of history, and in matters of serious argument and discussion, where the facts alluded to are con-

sidered incontestable. Thus the Norman Conquest will naturally be often alluded to in every history of our own country, and alluded to in terms which could not be used, if it were not for the notoriety of the truth of the fact. Speeches in Parliament are always full of allusion to facts which either are true, or are admitted as true by both parties. And it is material to observe, that facts not thus true, or not admitted, are not, and cannot be, alluded to seriously in the same manner. Who would endure any writer or speaker, who should allude to the fables of the building of London by Brutus, or of the supposititious birth of the first Pretender, as to facts which would supply a basis for argument? Controverted facts, or even fables such as these, may indeed be introduced to cover the arts of the rhetorician, but can have no place in any serious discussion.

I have now, therefore, to prove that this species of allusion is actually to be found in the sacred historians. And this it is impossible to prove better than in the words of Paley: "A remarkable instance of this kind is the *ascension*, which is not mentioned by St. John in its place, at the conclusion of his history, but which is

plainly referred to in the following words of the sixth chapter^a: ‘What, and if ye shall see the son of Man ascend up where he was before?’ And still more positively in the words which Christ, according to our evangelist, spoke to Mary after his resurrection, ‘Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God.’^b This can only be accounted for by the supposition that St. John wrote under a sense of the notoriety of Christ’s ascension, amongst those by whom his book was likely to be read. The same account must also be given of St. Matthew’s omission of the same important fact. The thing was well known, and it did not occur to the historian that it was necessary to add any particulars concerning it. It agrees also with this solution, and with no other, that neither Matthew nor John disposes of the person of our Lord in any manner whatever.”^c

We may draw the same conclusion also from the extreme rarity which is to be observed of any appeal, or of any express reference to our

^a Also John, iii. 13, and xvi. 28.

^b John, xx. 17.

^c Paley’s Evidences, Part I. Prop. 1. Ch. vii.

Saviour's miracles, except to the miracle of his resurrection from the dead, in the speeches of the Apostles, as recorded in the Acts, and in the epistles written by the same apostles^a. I must not be supposed to produce this rarity of appeal to our Saviour's miracles by way of proof that those miracles were performed. A rarity of appeal to them, *considered alone*, is rather an argument against their real performance. It has, indeed, been alleged as such^b: and the rare ascription to Mahomet (or I should rather say perhaps the very hesitating ascription) of the miraculous powers which are sometimes claimed for him, has always been regarded as one proof among many, that *he* possessed not any such powers at all.

But still I contend that granting only the facts that the apostles were sincere men, *on the whole*, that they believed *on the whole* that Christ had performed miracles, or that they were not teaching what they *on the whole* supposed to be false, I then contend that the very rarity of their appeals to our Saviour's or indeed to any other miracles, is an argument that they

^a Paley's Evidences, Part III. Ch. v.

^b Ibid.

not only on the whole believed them to have been performed, but also that they felt an entire conviction of their performance, undisturbed by any hesitation whatever. For these miracles, it is to be observed, were cardinal facts on which the truth of their religion depended. I do not mean that the Apostles and first teachers rested so much on them as we commonly do^a. But they were plainly facts of a kind most capable of proof, and which, whether or no they proved our Saviour to be the Messiah, it was plain that the Messiah must be proved to perform.—Here then are facts which the Apostles believed, of which it was necessary to them that all their hearers should be convinced. If they had apprehended, therefore, that there could be the least doubt of the facts, they would beyond all question have dwelt incessantly on the evidence of them. The only explanation of their comparative silence must be, as Paley says in the former citation, that it never occurred to them that there could be any doubt in the matter.

In farther confirmation of this view of the case, it may also be observed that even that mi-

^a Paley, *ibid*.

racle which in the Acts is *more* referred to than any of the rest, and which is referred to very frequently in St. Paul's Epistles, namely the miracle of our Saviour's resurrection, is not referred to as *evidence*, either in the Acts or the Epistles, but is referred to as *doctrine*: not as a proof of the divine mission of our Saviour, but as a pledge of the foundation of the Christian's hope of immortality. So of the miracle of the conversion of St. Paul^a. This also St. Paul himself refers to for purposes very different from that of evidencing the general truth of Christianity. He refers to it sometimes for the sake of eulogizing God's goodness in the having bestowed on him so signal a mark of his favour, sometimes in order to prove that his own authority was an authority equal to that of the other Apostles.

If this part of the argument can require farther corroboration, I may refer particularly to that portion of St. Paul's history as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, where it is said that he "came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his man-

^a Paley ubi suprà.

ner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is He."^a There is here no mention of, only one allusion to, the actual miracles : but is it in the least credible that in these three sabbath days which were occupied in proving that Jesus is Christ, the history of those miracles which were absolutely necessary to the proof, should not have been told, should not have been argued on at length ? To take this passage only ; is not the very natural language of the historian, is not his very omission of the detail of the proof, a considerable indication that he was in his own mind too well satisfied both of the truth and the notoriety of our Saviour's miracles to imagine a necessity for at all entering on that detail ? And when many passages of the same nature may be produced, does not the evidence of *all* of them amount to certainty ? So true is it, as Paley says, that both in the Acts and the Epistles, "the miraculous history was all

^a Acts, xvii. 1—3.

along *presupposed*.”* But the *presupposition* of any considerable fact on which men’s lives, and all their interests depend, their happiness in this world, and their hopes of a better, is only another word for the most decided conviction.

The only objection which can be alleged to these arguments is, that man is so liable to the contagion of superstition, so prone, especially when heated by enthusiasm, to believe every thing which is uncommon or marvellous, that unless we can sift accurately the whole process of his mind in arriving at the conviction that any miracle has been performed, we may fairly be allowed to distrust his conclusion. It was said, I think, by Johnson, that he would make half the mob of London believe that they had seen a man walk dry-shod across the Thames : and we know how readily depositions were found, that many people, of whom some did not understand Gaelic, had heard Temora and Fingal recited in the original. Such facts or stories, though no doubt often too strongly, or rather satirically than truly stated, and so as to throw too much discredit on testimony, have yet un-

* Paley’s *Evidences*, ubi *suprà*.

doubtedly so much real foundation in the natural fund of human credulity, that I cannot but attribute to them in many instances very considerable weight.

Stories of the marvellous, therefore, I freely admit, are to be canvassed in most cases with great suspicion and jealousy. But then there are circumstances attached to the Scripture miracles which clearly discriminate them from all those relations which have their real origin in such credulity. The character of the witnesses and the mode in which we collect the evidence are great points in the case. The mob of London, and all tumultuary assemblages, may be deceived because they are mobs, even though, individually, the persons composing them may be tolerably accurate judges of fact. There may also be witnesses who share nothing of the mob character, whose observation or judgment is not the less to be depended on, because other witnesses may be justly distrusted. The true character of the witnesses is one of the points which in all questions of evidence we are supposed to investigate.

But the Scripture witnesses are in all respects unimpeachable. Nothing can be less tumult-

tuary, nothing less enthusiastical, than the whole stile and character of all their relations. I know of no narratives composed by leaders of parties, as the sacred historians, no doubt, in some sense were, in which there exists, together with the same perfect sincerity, so little of that natural heat with which an actor relates acts of his own, or with which a follower details the history of his chief. They are all written with a very impressive, but at the same time with a very subdued, tone of feeling. They are all the compositions of grave and sober men, who had a degree of sadness mixed up in their composition, or who appear to have written under a most awful sense of their high responsibility for the exact accuracy of their relations. They report the life and doctrines of a divine instructor : they think themselves made “a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.”^a They recount their own errors, and even their incredulities, and this humbly, not in that confident boasting of which vice is often made the occasion. Are these the men of whom, under all these circumstances, we are to

^a 1 Cor. iv. 9.

suppose it imaginable that they were so blinded by enthusiasm that they could not discern the clear evidence of the senses?

In the Epistles, no doubt, written by some of these very men, a great ardour, or it may be said enthusiasm, is to be discerned. But then this is only the natural consequence of an entire conviction of the truth of the fact, and also a consequence which that conviction must have produced even in men of the most cautious temperaments. To be cautious in receiving all new facts and opinions, and to be ardent in asserting them when we are convinced of their truth, is the very perfection of our active and intellectual powers. And that the coolest and wariest of all the disciples, who may have examined most critically all the evidence of Christ's miracles, should become on conviction a most zealous assertor of all the doctrines which his divine master delivered, should put forth in his teaching all the spirit of a devotee, is only a consequence in the natural order of things: or rather it proves that those teachers who were first entrusted with the promulgation of our holy religion, were selected with that consummate knowledge of the human heart which belongs in

perfection to Him only who formed it. Thus it appears to me certain that the natural temper of the witnesses was that of men, in whom, if we can confide in any man, we may confide as being accurate judges of fact, as persons not likely to be carried away by credulity.

The most important point, however, is, that all credulity requires a previous disposition either to believe the particular fact proposed to it, or in the case of a miracle, to side with that cause in which the miracle is said to have been performed. If, in a question relating to matters of fact, we have reason to distrust the evidence of a mob, or of any individuals whose powers of discrimination we are inclined either to suspect or deny, it is because their prejudices are on that side to which they depose. One of those prejudices, it may be said, is the love of the marvellous.—But it is not so in cases where the belief of the marvellous runs counter to any other prepossessions either more rooted, or equally rooted, in the mind. Even in the most stupid and ignorant men the love of the marvellous, or, it may be said, credulity in general, is certainly not more strongly rooted than the contrary vice of a stubborn resistance to evi-

dence, where the evidence is for what they do not choose to believe. He who will obstinately resist equal proof of another kind will resist obstinately also the evidence of miracles. "They who believe not Moses and the prophets, will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead." If we regard the miracles of the Abbé Paris as genuine, we cannot doubt but that the Jesuits were no less inclined to refuse the credit which was justly due to them, than if we regard them as having been only fallacious, we conclude in like manner that it was the inclination of the Jansenists to embrace them with far more eagerness than they were worth.

But the miracles which were performed by Moses and Christ are wholly clear of every possible imputation of resting on the evidence of men who *swallowed* them greedily. Of the temper of the Jews in their passage to Canaan, if we know any thing, we know that their prepossessions were to return to Egypt, to rebel against Moses, to prefer Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, to him. Assuredly, with this temper, they were far more likely to dispute a true miracle than to believe in a false. And with regard to our Saviour, we have not only the tes-

timony of enemies^a, but also the testimony which we have of the friends of the religion is the testimony of men whose prepossessions could not have warped them in bearing witness to the miracles which they record.

If indeed those miracles had been performed in attestation of those claims to temporal greatness which the disciples expected Christ to exhibit, if the fact of the resurrection, to which they bear witness, had been a fact occurring amid the tide of success, or at a time when their expectations were raised and excited, we might then have a colour for *some* distrust of the evidence, as being the evidence of persons who might be deceived into the reception of a miraculous history which they were prone to believe. But seeing and knowing, as we see and know, that the miracles, which the disciples would have expected and wished for, were such miracles as that of fire from heaven to disperse and destroy the enemies of their *king*, we can have no reason to suspect the evidence which they have given to miracles wrought to substantiate the mission of a despised and rejected pro-

^a P. 102, et seq.

phet. Seeing and knowing that their hopes were sunk in his grave, and that they were left as sheep without a shepherd, we may reasonably infer that a mournful incredulity, an incredulity like that of St. Thomas, not a hastiness to believe the miracle of the resurrection, must have been the natural tendency of Christ's disconsolate followers.

And let me here observe, in addition to what has been said before^a on the same subject, how much the truth of this great miracle of the resurrection is illustrated by the detail of the circumstances which took place immediately subsequent to it. If, on our Lord's death, one of the more active disciples had put himself at the head of the rest, had harangued on the promise of the resurrection on the third day, and had kindled their enthusiasm to expect and anticipate it, there might then be some pretence that their faith or their anticipations fathered their belief that the fact expected took place. But the plain truth is, that, as might naturally be imagined in the case of sincere and simple-minded men, they were oppressed and astounded. They had "trusted that it had been he which

^a See pp. 111 and 116.

should have redeemed Israel''^a. But on the moment of his death that hope abated. They had nothing preconcerted, no system, no plan : nor was their hope re-kindled but by the re-appearance of Him, who alone, according to what we see of the case, had the power either to rescue or re-animate them. Thus apparent it is, if the whole history be not fabulous, that it was Christ's resurrection which inspired the apostles with zeal, not their zeal which inclined them to credit the resurrection.

To this it is to be added, that the credit obtained for the Christian miracles in the age when our religion was first promulgated, was obtained in an age which, as it has often been proved, is so far from being liable to the charge of blindness or ignorance, that among the ancients there was, probably, no age so intellectual. It is known to have been an age, in which, if we look first to the Jews, we have reason to think that the scepticism of the Sadducee was no less disposed to criticise narrowly the evidence adduced for any Christian miracle, than the bigotry of the Pharisee must have been

^a Luke xxiv. 21.

prone to reject it. If we look to the heathen world, it was also an age in which the general cultivation of the intellectual powers both by the Grecian schools and philosophers, and by the transmission of their opinions into the Roman literature, must have been extended more widely than in any preceding, and possibly than in any subsequent age of antiquity.

But farther also :—it has been seen that all or most of these characters of the truth of the Scripture miracles unite in the evidences of *two* revelations. The journey of the Israelites out of Egypt took place, according to the chronology of our Bibles, in the year of the world MMDXIII. Christ began to teach, according to the same computation, in the year MMMMXXXV. The two revelations were therefore separated from one another by an interval of not less than fifteen centuries. These two revelations are two parts of one system. If either be proved, that one proves both : and if each, therefore, may be proved severally by a chain of miracles possessing the most unexceptionable title to credit, this conspiracy of separate evidences confers a double strength on

SECT. III. CONVICTION OF THE WITNESSES. 161

both. Even though we should grant that there may be other true miracles^a, yet the strength and evidence, both of the Jewish and the Christian, are clearly discriminated from all other pretensions, which have ever, in any other instance or instances, been exhibited or proclaimed to the world. Nothing is found in history at all resembling the miracles of Christianity, except it be the miracles of the Mosaic dispensation. There is nothing to compare with the Mosaic miracles except the miracles of Christianity. This coincidence of the two proofs in one can be nothing else also than miraculous in itself, is no less beyond the power of man to have caused, than it is singular and beyond comparison.

^a See Ch. V.

SECTION IV.

OF THE OBJECTION THAT OUR EVIDENCE IS MERE PARTY EVIDENCE, AND THAT THIS IS FAR FROM BEING TRULY THE CASE.

It will be here objected that all this evidence is party evidence. We produce our own books : we tell our own story. It has been the *fortune*, it will perhaps be said, of Christianity, to become the predominant religion of Europe. The history of the opposition to it has been suppressed or neglected. This is said to be the reason why we have now no means of alleging any formal or detailed refutation of those miracles on which the evidence of it rests. There are other reported facts, it may be said, in ancient history of the same kind. It is shrewdly suspected that in the long contests which took place between the states of Greece and the Persian empire, the spirit and colouring of the romantic history which has been transmitted to us is wholly fallacious. It is the same with regard to the wars of Carthage and Rome. All our authorities display the virtue of one side,

and tell of the cruelty and characteristic perfidy of the other. Yet we scarcely doubt but that if the event had preserved to us the Punic instead of the Roman story, we might have had presented a directly contrary picture. And thus it is said, that as the miracles of our Saviour gained no doubt in his own sect an easy reception, so the triumph of the sect overbore opposition, and the original objections to them sank gradually into disrepute:—but that we may still presume that those objections, though now lost, might, if preserved, have appeared to us insurmountable. If not, why did not “the rulers or the Pharisees also believe on him”?^a Why else was it that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called”?^b Can we really suppose that if those miracles which in the Gospels are affirmed so positively to have been performed by our Saviour, can we really suppose that if they were actually performed, any of the spectators would have failed to believe in him?

To this I answer, first, that the *spirit* or *colouring* of many relations of historical facts, though of more value in some respects than the

^a John, vii. 48.

^b 1 Cor. i. 26.

facts themselves, yet cannot be compared with them in any question of evidence. Whether Greece or Persia demand our sympathy, we still cannot refuse credit to the Grecian historians as to the fact of there having been a battle of Marathon. Whether Scipio or Hannibal be our favourite hero, we cannot doubt but that there was a battle at Zama. Louisbourg was taken, whether the assailants or the defenders be supposed to have gained the most renown in the siege^a. We have also to observe, that the Scripture miracles are facts of such a species that they could not possibly have grown up out of the rest of the history by any stretch of exaggeration or partiality. They are the very facts on which the history turns, as essential a part of it as the battle of Salamis was of the expedition of Xerxes into Greece. If they be not true, the whole is more than a misrepresentation, the whole is a fable, a fable either invented by the Apostles, or at least imposed by them, and imposed successfully on mankind. To a case like this, a case of party colouring, a case of mere misrepresentation, cannot possibly be a case in point.

^a See Johnson's *Idler*, No. 20.

Secondly, I answer that the objection supposes that we have lost the evidence which we may presume to have been in the possession of the party which opposed the first teachers of Christianity. And so far, no doubt, is true, that there exists no evidence against the miracles of Christianity, which deserves for a moment the slightest attention. But then it is not true that we have lost the evidence of the reception which was given to Christianity by its earliest adversaries. We *have* proof that the party opposed to it at its origin had really no evidence against its miracles to produce. In Rome and Greece, no doubt, the predominant parties, forming always a tyranny of the very worst description, proscribed entirely all fair discussion on the merits or the demerits of Carthage or Persia. But the party of the Christians, for several ages after Christ, predominated nowhere. For several ages power was always against them. And though we have lost the writings of most of their earliest adversaries, yet we have still incontrovertible historical evidence that those adversaries did not contest the truth of the miracles :—and we may be assured that they *did* not, because they *could* not, contest it.

In proof of this point, namely that the truth of Christ's miracles was not contested by the earliest adversaries of our religion, I have to observe, in the first place, that, if the writers of the New Testament were sincere writers, that is, if they believed the story they told, *their* entire silence as to any denial of the miracles, except of the miracle of our Saviour's resurrection, is a sufficient proof to us that they were not seriously denied. If denied, sincere writers must have defended them. Probably an impostor would have defended them also. If he did not, it would be because he might calculate that it would be most prudent to avoid exciting the suspicion that any serious denial of them had ever been made. Finessing of this kind is, no doubt, sometimes practised. But still it is incredible that where the writers are so numerous as those whose writings compose the volume of the New Testament, and to these we may add also all the early Fathers, this finesse should have been adopted by them all. It is utterly incredible also, that, if adopted as a finesse, their silence on the subject should not obviously have exposed them either to a refutation the most cogent and pointed, or to reproaches which would render silence impossible. Finesse is noto-

riously a most dangerous weapon, and in almost all important matters, and especially in such a matter as the evidence of a religion, is always certain to be retorted with disgrace. And farther also, the very *mode of expression* which is uniformly adopted by the sacred writers, and which implies their conviction of the general belief, and the unequivocal notoriety of our Saviour's miracles^a, *could not* have been used if the writers had known that those very miracles were seriously denied, and they could not be denied without those writers knowing it.

But farther, if Christ's miracles could be denied, or could be denied with any the least colour of reason, why is Josephus so strangely silent concerning them? Josephus who wrote about the year LXXVI, is a very sedate and exact writer^b; he was a Jew; he wrote the Jewish history: he believed the miracles of Moses and of the prophets; he believed in a providence, and in the immortality of the soul^c; and though entirely silent concerning Christ and his miracles, he had, in the opinion of a

^a See the last Section, p. 138—151.

^b Lardner's Works, Vol. VII. p. 124.

^c Ibid. p. 127.

very critical judge, no disinclination to be a relater of prodigies^a. The reader will perceive that I regard as a manifest forgery a passage now found in his books of Jewish Antiquities^b. And, though this passage bears an express testimony to our Saviour's miracles, I am entirely satisfied that the suspicious silence of the writer is worth a thousand such testimonies to them as this. For why was he silent? He could not be ignorant either of a matter so considerable as our Saviour's history, or of the stupendous miracles which were ascribed to him by his followers. The Christians even then were not a sect so insignificant, that a writer who has dwelt largely on the other sects among the Jews^c could naturally pass them over as unworthy of notice. Ten years previously to the date of this work of Josephus, the Christians even at Rome were sufficiently numerous to have become objects of jealous apprehension and tyranny, and to have the crime imputed to them of burning the city^d. In Asia and Judea they

^a Lardner's Works, Vol. vii. p. 127.

^b Ant. Jud. Lib. xviii. Cap. iii. § 3. Lardner, Vol. vii. p. 120.

^c Lardner, Vol. vii. p. 134.

^d See Note G at the end of the volume.

were still more numerous than at Rome, still more under the observation of Josephus himself. There are other instances also in which this writer has said nothing of other facts which it did not suit him to mention^a.

Under all these circumstances, Lardner's conclusion is not, as it appears to me, less evidently convincing than the conviction which we should derive from demonstration itself, that Josephus "had nothing to say against Jesus or the Christians, with any appearance of truth and credibility; he therefore thought it better to be silent, and thereby, if possible, bury them in utter oblivion."^b But this argument is no less convincing as to the miracles, than as to "Jesus and the Christians" generally: the miracles themselves being an important part of the history, and the claim of miracles, as Josephus must have well known, being absolutely necessary to the Christian cause. If this claim, therefore, had been capable of refutation, we may be assured that Josephus would not have been silent concerning it, any more than he would have been

^a Lardner, Vol. VII. 133—135.

^b Ibid. p. 133. Compare Tillotson, Vol. II. p. 563. Sermon 186, quoted *ibid.* p. 107.

silent concerning the religion in general, if he had possessed sufficient means of confuting it.

To complete what I have to say of the Jewish adversaries of Christianity, I may here add farther, that the Talmudists “insinuate that all the great works ascribed to our Saviour were performed by virtue of magical arts.”^a But this is to admit, which is all we are here concerned for, that those great works were actually performed. And that these very writers would have denied these works if they could, is evident from their denying the miraculous birth of our Saviour^b, a miracle which from its very nature rests not, and pretends not to rest, on any evidence of its own, but which rests on the evidence of those other miracles which they do not, because they cannot, deny. And though the Talmudical writers are comparatively recent, most of them being referred to about five hundred years after Christ, yet there is not a doubt but that they represent with fidelity the traditions which were in their time current among the Jews. If also the possession of magical or miraculous powers, powers which for the present pur-

^a Lardner, Vol. VII. p. 151—153.

^b Ibid. p. 155.

pose are of the same import precisely, had ever been seriously denied to our Saviour by the Jews of the first five centuries of our era, it is wholly incredible that the tradition of their having been denied should not have come down to, and should not be noticed by the Talmudists. That none such is noticed by them, I take on the credit of the accounts which are given in our own great writers Lightfoot and Lardner, who, if any such could be found, would not have failed to observe it. Modern Jews do, indeed, deny the miracles; but they deny them only as the deist denies them, not on a scrutiny of the evidence of their having been performed, but, as has been observed already^a, on the mere vague allegation that man is prone to credulity and superstition. Allegations like this are nothing like evidence: they are only scepticism; and a sort of scepticism which in truth betrays a no less irrational and vicious state of mind, than is indicated by a proneness to believe the most fabulous histories. To carry the maxim that man is prone to credulity so far as to deny without examination facts which it is our duty to sift and investigate, is not only *impious* as it

^a See p. 104.

refuses attention to claims which God himself may have authorised, but argues a *credulity* also in that general maxim which is not to be exceeded even by the lowest fanaticism.

So far as to the silence of the Jews on this subject. With regard to heathens:—of them also it is, I believe, certain, that for the first hundred and forty years after Christ's death, we can trace no denial of the actual facts recorded in the Scripture as our Saviour's miracles. The accounts transmitted to us by the Younger Pliny, and by Tacitus, are a sufficient proof that the number of Christians was in their time very considerable, and that their progress was the object of much and jealous suspicion. The severe persecutions of them which had already taken place, are another proof of the same indubitable fact. And if it could be supposed that this progress of the religion, and this jealousy of its influence or its pretensions, must have excited among heathens the same critical attention to the claim of miracles set up by its professors, which it has been proved that the Jews, who had always been taught to regard miracles as among the signs of the coming of the Messiah, must have exerted, and did exert on the occasion, we

should be entitled to infer from this silence of the heathen writers the same conclusion as from that of the Jews, namely that they *did not*, because they *could not* deny them. The heathens charge also both Jews and Christians with *magic*^a. Thus they also, it would seem, admit the truth of the facts. And where Pliny reports of the Christians in Bithynia that it was their custom to sing hymns to Christ as a god^b, we can hardly question but that in the then state of opinions, he must have supposed them to attribute to him the same miraculous powers which were commonly attributed to the gods of heathenism.— On the whole, however, and after considering all circumstances, it appears to me that this silence of the heathen writers, this absence in them of all denial of the Christian miracles, proves only that they were received generally without denial; but is insufficient to prove, what is proved by the Jewish silence, that there was no ground for denying them. If those heathen writers, indeed, could reasonably be supposed to have felt any jealousy of the claim of miracles in Christianity, their *not denying* might

^a Lardner, Vol. VII. 250. 257.

^b Ibid. 293.

prove that they *could not* deny them. If they felt that jealousy, they would have denied them if they could. It is hardly possible, also, that if they had actually been denied by any authority entitled to serious attention, that denial should not have been recorded by heathen writers. The denial of a history which they did not believe, the belief of which is called by Tacitus a pernicious superstition, and which was brought before Pliny in his judicial capacity, no love of the marvellous could have induced them to suppress.

But prodigies were, in truth, in the heathen world, so little regarded by all persons not immediately concerned in them; even though a divine power had been exerted in Palestine, the belief or the denial of it must have seemed to import so little to the worshipper of the gods of Greece, or of Italy, that probably, in that age, false claims of miracles might have easily passed current among the heathens. I infer nothing, therefore, as to the reality of Christ's miracles from their not being denied by the early heathen writers.

The first denial which I can find in any heathen writer of the facts which constitute our

Saviour's miracles are in the writings of Celsus, as preserved to us by Origen, which are referred by Lardner to the year CLXXVI. Celsus on some occasions denies the performance of the miracles^a. He appears on other occasions to allow that they were performed^b, but attributes the performance to the use of magical arts^c. It is exceedingly doubtful whether he believed in magic himself^d; but he was manifestly desirous to throw out all imputations, which, though he could not but know them to be inconsistent with one another, he might yet think would *tell* against Christianity.

All such imputations, however, are nothing like evidence, except that the hesitation of so able and determined an adversary to venture on a denial of our Saviour's miracles universally, is, in truth, both a real, and a very considerable proof that those miracles were really performed. As for proper evidence in opposition to the miracles, as for any counter authority, these very objections prove that there was none to produce :

^a Lardner, Vol. VII. 357. VIII. 22, 24, 25, 33.

^b Ibid. VIII. 25, and compare Cyril's quotation from Julian, *ibid.* Note x. p. 399.

^c Ibid. VIII. 24—26.

^d Ibid.

they prove that Celsus, even within a century and half after the death of our Saviour, could only set to work as a modern sceptic would do; that, though personating a Jew, he could produce no Jewish testimonies against the miracles, that, like modern sceptics, "he had only the Gospel to search, as Origen more than once observes, for evidence against the Gospel."^a—Hence it follows clearly that the miracles of our Saviour were not contested in the first ages of Christianity, and that when unbelievers became anxious to contest them they could not produce any contrary evidence.

This is complete : it rebuts entirely the objection that there may have been evidence now lost against the miracles of Christianity. It shows the falsehood of the very facts which must be assumed as the very principle of that objection. It shows that at the period, when, if there had been any contrary evidence, it undoubtedly must, and would have been alleged, none was alleged in the least deserving attention : and hence it plainly follows that there was none to allege.

^a Sherlock as quoted by Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 68.

But though thus this answer is a complete answer in point, I cannot dismiss the subject without repeating, that we should still have no just cause to doubt of the real performance of our Saviour's miracles, even though we had no evidence except our own to produce. Though we possessed only the evidence of our own writings, yet that evidence is not in the least degree invalidated by any exceptions which may be justly taken to the common unfaithfulness of party historians. Where we distrust the accounts of party historians, we must refer their unfaithfulness either to fraud or to prejudice. But that the sacred writers had any fraudulent design in giving their testimony to the miracles which they have recorded, in giving a testimony by which they had nothing to gain, by which they had every thing to lose, and for which truth only could have procured reception, is a notion so absurd that it is, I believe, scarcely ever espoused by any person who even attempts to consider it^a. With regard to their prejudices, these were not Christian, but Jewish.—However prejudiced, yet with martyrdom in prospect, no en-

^a Cf. pp. 115, 116.

thusiasm could have induced them to imagine such facts as those which they record as the basis of our religion. Still less could they have procured a general reception for facts, the belief of which, as of the doctrines founded on them, fell in no-where with the bent of men's opinions, but were, without exception, either among Jews a stumbling-block, or among Greeks, foolishness.

The only objection, which now remains to be disposed of, is the objection that, if the evidence had been in reality thus incontrovertible, the Scribes and Pharisees would have believed in our Saviour.—But to this I answer that they did believe in him : that is, they did believe in the real performance of his miracles, which is here the single point in question. Those miracles, we know, they would have denied, if they could^a. But they could not deny them. They had no resource, therefore, but to deny the consequence which we draw from them, or to contend that they might be performed, not by God, but by the devil, or by the aid of occult or magical arts ; or, at all events, that they might be performed by a sinner, and did not carry necessarily

^a Acts, iv. 16.

with them the sanction of God. But this resource we know to be unavailing, and accordingly the proof of the real performance is all *we* ask or require.

With regard to the Mosaic miracles the case is the same. The reputation of Moses as a great and skilful magician, might, even if there existed no other reason, explain sufficiently why even the belief of those wonders, which he was generally reputed in the ancient world to have wrought, did not necessarily induce other nations to become Jews, did not prevent them from regarding the Jewish religion as both an unsocial and a disreputable superstition.

How remarkable a harmony may be inferred from these considerations between certain features of the history of our religion, the co-existence of which may at first appear to be paradoxical! *We* say, and it is commonly admitted by modern infidels, that the evidence of miracles, supposing them to be performed, is a decisive proof of the divine sanction and authority. Yet we admit that the revelation by Moses, though vouched by miracles of the greatest splendour and publicity, stood for fifteen centuries nearly alone in the world, making no pro-

gress out of the limits of Judea. We admit that Christianity, though resting also on decisive miracles, made even in Judea, where those miracles were performed, only a gradual progress. How happened this, if the evidence was so decisive? This is the question triumphantly asked by the infidel.

But the answer is obvious, that though the miracles were performed, yet the real performance of them was not *thought* a decisive evidence by all those persons to whom it was originally addressed. We know now that they *ought* to have thought it so. We have also *their* clear testimony to the truth of the facts; and thus we reconcile with our plenary evidence of the divine origin of the Jewish and Christian religions, both the distinct subsistence of the Jewish polity for so many ages, and the gradual conversion of Jews and heathens to Christianity; for whatever reasons, known or unknown, the progress of our religion may have been thus guided by Providence. All this we reconcile in the most satisfactory manner, and on evidence the most indubitable; and I know not how else we could have reconciled it so satisfactorily, still retaining, as we do, that plenary evidence which

it is in *our* power to deduce clearly from miracles, without perplexing ourselves with any of those delusions concerning magic, or demons, or concerning any other occult principles of nature, from which it is the privilege of our age to be emancipated.

How satisfactory also both to reason and religion that we *are* emancipated from those pernicious delusions, and that our accurate investigation of those laws of the universe which may be deduced from our observation of the common course of events, allows us to conclude that events out of those laws may and do enable us, under certain circumstances, to infer with certainty either the immediate or the remote authority of the divine author of all.

SECTION V.

THAT THE LAPSE OF TIME SINCE THE MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED HAS NOT WEAKENED OUR GROUNDS OF RATIONAL CONFIDENCE IN THE EVIDENCE OR TESTIMONY ON WHICH THEY DEPEND.

It does not appear to me that the evidence which we possess of the real performance of the Scripture miracles is any way lessened by the lapse of time which has taken place since their occurrence. A history transmitted through a succession of generations is said by Locke^a, to lose at each transmission some part of its evidence. But it has been justly remarked^b, that this can only be as it loses part of those proofs by which it was entitled to credit: and, assuming the authenticity of the records conveyed to us, I cannot perceive that, in any respect whatever, the proof which we possess that the Scripture miracles were performed, is inferior to the proof which, supposing the history true, was at-

^a Essay on the Human Understanding. Book IV. Ch. xvi. § 10.

^b Horne's Introduction, Vol. i. p. 262.

tainable by those persons who received an account of them from eye-witnesses.

In appreciating the correctness with which evidence may be transmitted, it of course makes no difference whether it be the evidence of a miracle, or the evidence of only an ordinary fact. If the evidence of the miracles of Moses or Christ *must* be less now than it was, in the age in which they lived, to all persons who were not eye-witnesses, so must the evidence of the invasion of Asia by Alexander, or of the existence of the war between Cæsar and Pompey, be to us a less evidence than that which was possessed in Italy or Macedonia, in the ages immediately subsequent to those events. But if it may be affirmed to be wholly incredible that, if no such events had existed, they could by any possibility have been so attested as they are in history, our evidence of them is not diminished, nor, while we retain in our hands the same complete attestations, will it ever be diminished to future generations by the lapse of any assignable number of ages. Keep a chain unbroken, and there can be no difference of strength between the several links of it: that is, no difference arising from the order in which they are placed.

To the eye, no doubt, the order, or the length, may in point of *impression* make a very great difference. And so many persons who perceive that twice two is four, cannot see that in every right-angled triangle the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides. Yet these two positions are, doubtless, equally certain. *Reason* sees that it is so. It is the very business of the reasoning faculty to carry into a conclusion often very remote, and even undiscernible to careless inquirers, the *very same* certainty which exists in the premises.

Or to take for example any supposed affirmation of a miracle which might be asserted now to take place.

Suppose it asserted that some miracle has been performed in Dublin, at the tomb of a Roman Catholic saint: and suppose also that we receive an account of it from persons professing to have been eye-witnesses. Is this stronger evidence that some such miracle has been *asserted*, than that which we should derive from receiving authentic documents that the miracle had been affirmed by the very same witnesses to severall large bodies of unprejudiced men, to the civil authorities, and to other cautious in-

quirers, and that they all had actually, in conscientious belief of the fact, abandoned all their civil and political interests, and become converts to the Roman Catholic faith? We suppose them to do this in defiance of that ridicule which they must expect to encounter in venturing to espouse what would commonly be regarded so stale a trick as a miracle, in defiance of the injury or inconvenience which they must sustain by deserting their own, the predominant party, and embracing the interests of a rival party instead; and what is perhaps still more, in painful opposition to all those prepossessions of birth and education which might naturally incline them to despise all such pretensions.

Suppose all this, and then, I ask, must authentic documents which prove that this conduct of such persons, and these conversions, arose from their conviction that some miracle had been performed, a conviction founded on the affirmation of persons professing to have been eye-witnesses;—must, I ask, these documents, if quite express on these points, be of necessity a less evidence to us that some such affirmation was made, than the evidence which we should possess if the same report had been made to our-

selves by those same eye-witnesses? It is removed a step farther from us. The witnesses in the one case tell their story *to us*: we have *proof* in the other case that they told their story *to others*. In the mere *impression* there may be much in this difference. The vulgar will listen to him who has *seen* the king, with much stronger interest than to one who has not seen him. But that there *is* a king they might know with equal certainty, though they were to see nothing but the newspapers. It is not impossible that there may be Atheists now, who would have believed in God if they could have conversed with Adam. But yet I see not that they must have had more *reason* for believing, merely because they were placed so much the nearer to the original fountain of all human existence.

And so in the case of the supposed miracle in Dublin. If we know absolutely that certain facts *must* have originated in some story of miracles, that they *cannot* possibly be so much misrepresented to us as that there should not have been *any* foundation for the story, we have then equal evidence that some such story existed, whether we ourselves see the witnesses of it or not. Prior facts which are *necessary* to,

or which are *implied by* other subsequent facts, cannot be less certain than those subsequent facts themselves. Hence I think it follows, that our not seeing the witnesses may make no difference to us in the strength of our evidence, namely of our evidence that the miraculous fact was *affirmed* or *asserted* on the occasion assigned.

But if one remove makes no difference, why should a hundred? or rather, if these authentic documents which we now possess of the fact, go down in their integrity, and with full proof of their integrity, to future ages, those future ages will, of course, be placed in the same circumstances with those in which we are placed now. As we have evidence equal to that derived from eye-witnesses, so must future ages also have the same evidence. There exists not any necessity that it must be altered by time.

Nor is the case of the Scripture miracles any way different. If *authentic* documents are come down to us, which contain statements either of the Jewish story or of the Christian, which *could not* have found their way into those documents, unless some miracles had been at least asserted to have been performed, we have then

as much *proof* that that assertion was made, as if we ourselves had lived at the time of the promulgation of the religion, or had learned the facts from eye-witnesses.

Moreover, it is certain that even the evidence of eye-witnesses may be inferior to documentary evidence. If, indeed, we can examine personally *all* the witnesses, or a sufficient number of them, we have all the *elements* of the fullest proof in our hands. No evidence can be imagined more perfect than this. But if we see only one, or only a few of the eye-witnesses, or if we see them without possessing the means of judging of their credibility, an authentic document which details clearly the whole evidence, or even declares merely what was the impression which it made on a sufficient number of grave and considerate men, may be better authority than that of one, or than that of only a few eye-witnesses. The notes which a judge makes of the facts proved on a trial, are far better evidence than the account which may be extracted from only a few out of many witnesses, or may even be better than that which a less able, or a less attentive interrogator might probably have been able to extract from them all.

Hence it follows, that even in this age in which we live, we, if our documents be authentic, and if they be sufficiently ample, may have as good evidence that some miracles were alleged in behalf of the revelations of Moses and of Christ, as even their contemporaries could possess, if not eye-witnesses. And even to the eye-witnesses we yield in the nature, rather than in the degree, of that assurance which we possess. For though between the evidence of sense, which was possessed by the eye-witnesses, and that of reason, which is the evidence of all other persons, no comparison seems possible to be drawn, yet it is not clear that there must be in regard to *certainty* any difference between the two evidences. I see not that we ought to have a stronger assurance of the existence of Buonaparte, whom we may have seen, than of that of Cæsar, whom we certainly have not seen.

The degree of certainty, therefore, which may be found to exist in any documentary evidence, is to be weakened by nothing, but either the want of fulness in it, or the want of sufficient proof of its authenticity. But the evidence is, in point of fulness, sufficiently full; is sufficiently full, at least, to prove that miracles

were asserted, and that the assertion was generally received and admitted ; if the affirmation of their having been so received and admitted is made in terms so full and distinct, that it could not possibly, if a false affirmation, have been imposed as true on the world. The authenticity of the records we in this inquiry assume. I may here add, however, that the mere reception of such records is, for all common purposes, proof enough of their authenticity, coupled as their reception is with the absolute silence of history, as to their having had any other origin than what they pretend to.

It is, then, clear that we possess the same evidence which was possessed in the very first ages of Christianity, that some miracles were at that time asserted to have been performed. And this evidence consists in the utter impossibility that our authentic documents of the origin of the religion, documents containing the assertion of those miracles, could have been derived to us under all the circumstances in which we possess them, unless those assertions had been really made by persons professing to have witnessed those miracles.

But if we have the same evidence that these

miracles were asserted, which was possessed by those who received their accounts of them from the eye-witnesses, we have also the same evidence that they were really performed. We know that they were performed, because if they had not been performed, we know that they either would not, or could not, have been asserted. They would not have been asserted through mistake or enthusiasm, because the historians were neither prejudiced nor enthusiastic, and because the facts were such as could not be mistaken. They would not have been asserted through fraud and imposture, both because the historians were sober-minded and sincere, and because the allegation of miracles attesting a new religion, a religion opposed to existing prejudices and interests, and requiring the greatest and the most disinterested sacrifices, is of itself the highest proof which can be imagined of the highest principle, and of extreme disinterestedness. And farther than this, also, unless really performed, these miracles could not possibly have been alleged with any the least hope of gaining reception.

On all these points we have, I think, no less evidence now, than the evidence possessed at

the first origin of our religion. Of the honesty and sobriety of the Gospel historians we have evidence in their writings which, I apprehend, is not less conclusive than a personal knowledge of them during their lives would have been. Of the fact that they sacrificed all their temporal interests ; that in asserting the religion which rested on these miracles they devoted themselves to persecution and death ; we have evidence no less cogent than we have of their asserting the miracles, evidence also which is no less cogent to us than it was to the original converts.

But the greatest and most obvious proof of the whole, and that which is sufficient to decide the whole question at once, is to consider the consequences of asserting any such facts in behalf of a religion which was vehemently opposed by the prevalent party in the state, a party both able and inclined to inflict persecution and death, and actually inflicting them in some instances, on its professors. It is morally impossible that in such circumstances any such assertions could have been falsely made without meeting certain and prompt refutation. That it *is* impossible we have the assured evidence of

those most active principles of our nature, which we know from history did operate; which we know from our observation and experience of mankind must have operated, in ancient Judea, in the very same manner in which they would operate now, were any such assertions now made amongst us, and so made as to appear worthy attention.

So entirely certain is it that the evidence of the Christian miracles loses not any thing by the lapse of time since their performance : so certain is it that a religion which commands the obedience of every nation and of every age, to which God's providence imparts its salutary doctrines, which promulgates a law which is of perpetual obligation, carries its evidence as far as it carries its pretensions, and wherever it asserts its claim on the affections, appeals, with no diminution of its primitive force, to the considerate judgment of the understanding.

SECTION VI.

RECAPITULATION OF THE PRECEDING ARGUMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS; AND ALSO OF THE PROBABILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM OR DOCTRINE, IN BEHALF OF WHICH, PRINCIPALLY, THE SCRIPTURE MIRACLES ARE ALLEGED.

It was shown at length in the dissertation prefixed to this treatise, that every exertion of superhuman power must, under certain conditions^a, be accounted wholly conclusive of a strictly divine authority. It was shown in Chapter I. that the Scripture miracles, if really performed, or performed in the manner related, *were* exertions of a power unequivocally superhuman. And it has since been proved, in the former sections of the present chapter, that these miracles were really so performed.

Hence it follows, necessarily, that under those same conditions which have been premised as in part constituting the proof of a strictly divine authority, the Scripture miracles do actually

^a Which were expressed also in the first paragraph of Ch. 1. p. 52.

confer that authority on the holy religion for which we allege them. It will farther be shown also in the course of this section^a, that the Scripture miracles possess the requisite conditions, or at least that a writer on this particular subject, is justly entitled to assume their possession of them. And thus will be completed the entire proof of our case, a proof no less rigid *as to its argumentative process* than any mathematical demonstration or formula. Nor is there any doubt whatever as to the fundamental principle that superhuman power, under the conditions assigned, confers on the agent a divine authority. I cannot account this principle as being less certain than any the clearest axiom of geometry.

There are some of our positions, however, which cannot be asserted to rest on principles so evident as I trust this has been shown to be. Some, indeed, which rest on our knowledge of man, and of his moral nature and character, we have the power of affirming with the most absolute confidence. We are entitled to assume that that nature and character have been universally the same through all that series of ages, which has elapsed since the creation; the same in the

^a P. 210, et sqq.

ages ascribed to Moses and Christ, as in every other age of antiquity, or in the age in which we ourselves exist. Man, taken collectively, is subject at all times to the same passions, equally attracted by the hope of good, equally deterred by the fear of evil. Though it may require more skill therefore to lay down categorically those principles of human nature which we may assume, than to lay down the principles of number or quantity, I know not but that out of our abundant materials we might establish some of them with equal certainty.

Other of our positions, however, do not rest on man's nature, nor yet on the inferences which we are entitled to draw from the necessary *faithfulness* and good providence of God. We must rest them in some measure on our own application of those principles in cases made known to us only by remote testimony, and in circumstances which we have no means of appreciating but by the aid of learning, and of historical research. This may be called, in general, the moral part of our evidence; or, to speak more precisely, that portion of the moral part of it, in which alone there can be any apprehension of error. Moral evidence, in general, is often en-

titled fallacious. This general maxim is, I believe, often the sole source of modern incredulity in the Scripture miracles.

But before we can be entitled to account it fallacious *in this case*, it is proper and necessary to trace out systematically those particular propositions, both of fact and of reasoning, on which alone the truth *of this case* depends; that we may so be able to fix distinctly that doubt, if any there be, which may still adhere to the moral part of the proof. Our conclusion is certain, if no such doubt can be found. If we do find any, we doubtless carry into our conclusion that degree of doubt, and that degree only, which may adhere to that particular point which is doubtful. But I may here observe that this doubt may not be greater, may, indeed, often not be so great, in a case of moral evidence, as in a case of what are commonly called the *mixed sciences*. Arcs of the meridian have been at various times measured with a very remarkable and diligent accuracy. Assuming the correctness of all the angles and bases, the conclusions inferred may be called *demonstrated* conclusions. Also, making allowance for those minute errors which may *in fact* have crept into the practical measurements, we

are equally entitled to call the conclusions *demonstrated*.

If we can be permitted, however, to call such conclusions *demonstrative*, it is certain that moral evidence may be *demonstrative* also: and though we abstain, as we ought to do, from using the word, demonstration, in any sense in which its meaning may seem ambiguous, we have still to acknowledge, that if the facts or the principles, which are assumed as the basis of any moral conclusion, are *equally certain* with the facts of practical science, that conclusion is *equally certain* also, and even *more certain*, if, as is often the case, the moral facts are *better* evidenced than the others.—I ought not here to dwell, perhaps, on these mere reasoning principles, but I trust I may be excused, if any reader have been tempted, by the seducing habits of scientific investigation, to under-rate the real strength of moral and historical evidence, a strength often greater than that of many conclusions which are sometimes thought to partake of the nature of demonstration, and a species of evidence which is of incalculably higher importance than any other which can exercise our reasoning powers.

I shall now retrace, summarily, that series of propositions which has been alleged in proof of the real performance of the miracles, this being all, which, after what has already been premised^a, can be required to the proof of their *certain* validity.

First, then, it was alleged that the records in our possession, which give an account of the performance of these miracles, have been faithfully transmitted from the original relaters^b.

It was alleged, secondly, that the matters related, that is, the miracles themselves, are matters in which the relaters could not have been imposed upon, and could not have intended to impose upon others^c.—And this point was proved by showing in detail of these miracles, that the accounts which we have received are accounts of matters of fact which are in their nature clearly miraculous, but which, if not real, no credulity could have believed, and for which no artifice could have gained reception among mankind^d.

This point was confirmed by showing distinctly of the Scripture miracles, both that they

^a See pp. 194, 195.

^b Sect. I. of this chapter, pp. 82, 83.

^c Ibid. p. 83.

^d Ibid. pp. 83—103.

could not have passed, and that they were not received, without adequate, and indeed without jealous examination^a: that the witnesses were men who could not intend to deceive^b: that the number of the miracles adds to the strength of the evidence: and that though the evidence of some, taken alone, be deficient, this is far from being hostile to the truth of the whole^c.

To this it is added that the impression made on the witnesses, and the fulness of conviction which we may prove them to have entertained, renders their testimony the more complete and decisive^d; and that the only objection which can be raised to this evidence consists merely in vague charges of credulity, which, however, do not apply in the case of the Scripture witnesses, nor yet, indeed, in any case where there is no previous disposition to credit the facts proposed for belief, or to take the side of the party alleging them. Neither in the case of Moses, nor in that of our Saviour, did any such previous disposition exist. The inclination of the Jews was always for Egypt, to prefer to that of Moses almost any other authority. Still more, also, in

^a Sect. I. of this chapter, pp. 104—117.

^b Ibid. p. 117.

^c Sect. II. pp. 118—125.

^d Sect. III. pp. 126—151.

the case of our Saviour. His miracles have the testimony both of friends and of enemies. But even his friends had to renounce all their prepossessions. The side they were *inclined to* was the side of temporal greatness. Messiah *the prince* was the Messiah they expected. They had no prepossessions *against* their own Jewish sympathies, nor any disposition to embrace the scandal of the cross^a.

Were we to conclude here, we should have an incontrovertible case for the real performance of the Scripture miracles. Against such evidence surmise and suspicion have not, as I apprehend, any legitimate place.—But even against the surmise that any evidence may have perished which may have once existed against the truth of the miracles, we have proof to oppose that none such ever existed^b; and it has also been made evident that the lapse of time since the performance has not weakened our ground of rational confidence in the evidence or testimony on which they depend^c.

Such is our proof of the real performance of the Scripture miracles: a proof of which at

^a Sect. III. pp. 151—161.

^b Sect. IV. pp. 162—181.

^c Sect. V. pp. 182—193.

least one link must be rent, before our evidence can be accounted less than infallible.—And to rend one of these links it must be contended successfully, either

That the Scripture writers do not intend to relate miracles :

Or that their writings were not published at the time, when the events related in them are said to have happened, but may have been manufactured afterwards, when both Jews and Christians respectively may have been disposed to embrace any fabulous miracles attributed to the founders of their respective religions :

Or, though published at the time, yet that the writers or publishers were both willing and able, in such a matter as this, to impose false histories on the world, and that their adversaries had either no means, or no care, to refute them :

Or that the writers or witnesses were either deceived, or self-deluded, into the belief of seeing those many great miracles which they have recorded ; as of seeing that miracle of the pillar of fire and cloud, which for forty years led the Israelites through the wilderness, of seeing the blind restored to sight, of witnessing the resurrection, and the ascent of Christ into heaven.

Of these counter-positions if one or more be not tenable, the real performance of the Scripture miracles, with all the conclusions which we derive from that performance, cannot but rest on irresistible evidence. We have only to decide, therefore, that these positions are *not* tenable, and we so confirm the whole argument as perfectly full and conclusive. There can no longer be any scepticism as to the reality of the miracles, or the consequent truth of that religion which they attest.

The only real question, therefore, is as to the admissible truth of some one or other of these counter-positions. Which of them all will the sceptic choose to uphold? With the records before us of the alleged history of our religion, will he contend that those records say nothing of miracles?^a With our historical evidence of its early establishment, and the general reception of those records throughout the world, will he contend that they were imposed on it at a subsequent period, or that the original records were subsequently interpolated with these adventitious stories of miracles? Will he say that

^a See note H at the end of the volume.

Christianity, at the time of its first establishment, was the crafty device of a predominant party, that consequently no interests, or none sufficiently powerful, had any inducement to contest the miracles which it claimed, and that therefore they may have passed easily like the Roman fable of the communications between Numa and the goddess Egeria?—or, not to exhaust needlessly these groundless suggestions, will he affirm, lastly, and this both of Moses and Christ, that while they studied, perhaps, like other leaders of parties, to extend their influence over their devoted disciples by a claim of supernatural illumination and power, the disciples both *fancied* that they saw them work real miracles, and with that willing credulity which we may often observe in fanatics, colouring some circumstances and inventing others, produced the fabric which we now uphold as divine; and were finally enabled by that real enthusiasm, which will often ally itself with what is commonly called pious fraud, to propagate in the world the fertile product of this union between bigotry and deceit?

To say the whole truth;—of all the unfounded hypotheses which have ever been set up against

Christianity, this last is by far the least untenable. Such is the vast fund of human credulity; so natural is the alliance also, to a certain extent, between pious fraud and weak superstition, that it may be worthy of inquiry what effects may be produced by the powerful co-operation of these active principles. This question also, may be the more worthy of consideration, because it has been seen in some cases, as more particularly in the case recorded of Xavier², that even where the teacher has not claimed to perform miracles, miracles have been still claimed for him by his enthusiastic disciples, of whom, if all cannot be accounted wholly sincere, yet we may hope that few can be thought entirely fraudulent.

Be it supposed, then, that their credulity made the disciples believe, and that their real enthusiasm, and pious fraud in conjunction, made converts to their belief. Be this, as it really is, the turning point of the question, whether the miracles were performed or not, whether Christ and Moses were false prophets or true.

Here then it is to be observed, that whoever takes up this hypothesis must hold, in fact, the

* See Note I at the end of the volume.

following three positions, the refutation of any one of which is sufficient to overturn his whole hypothesis. I. He must hold, first, that the disciples were disposed to be credulous of that particular doctrine which was preached or promulgated to them. II. He must hold, secondly, that that credulity may have disposed them to credit false miracles of even that decisive character which belongs to the clearest miracles which are recorded in Scripture, miracles in which deception must have been so exceedingly difficult. III. He must hold, thirdly, that they were not only themselves thus credulous, or thus deceived, but also that the testimony of such credulous persons was able to propagate and establish the same delusion both among the Jewish and the Gentile world.

All these things must be believed, or else the miracles must be admitted. Are then these things credible?—I answer,—Not any one of them. Omitting for the present all consideration of Moses, (though of the case of Moses we know enough to be satisfied that it was in all these points precisely similar to that of Christ,) we know enough of nature, and enough of the history of the first origin of Christianity, to be

assured that the disciples were not disposed to be credulous in the mission of a prophet who repressed their national expectation of becoming emancipated from the Roman yoke through his means, who led them to nothing but to a life of virtuous toil, and through that to the rewards of virtue hereafter.

We deny, with the same confidence, that even if *humanly* credulous, they could yet, *under all circumstances*, have given credit to such miracles as those of which they are the recorded witnesses. And we also know, equally, that surrounded as they were by powerful adversaries, adversaries most unwilling to admit their claim of miracles, and, unquestionably, able to refute them, if false, their credulity could not have established *false* miracles as being at least one great basis of their religion. They are such a basis.—Therefore the religion is true.—Still more than this also, we have the cumulative evidence of all the same arguments over again, as they may be applied to prove the truth of the Jewish revelation, arguments which none, except the Jewish and the Christian, have ever possessed the power of using.

In addition to all this also, it is a farther evi-

dence of the truth of all the Scriptural miracles, that they are all wrought in attestation of that one and only system of religion, which, in point of character, or of inherent probability, can approve itself to the judgment of any rational mind as entitled to claim a divine origin. For that the Jewish and the Christian are the same religion is a point on which I presume, all but Jews are agreed. Each of these revelations has, indeed, its own separate proof, proofs which combine with united force to prove both^a, but internally they both harmonize into one.

And this great peculiarity of the Scripture miracles, namely, their being worked in behalf of a *probable* religion, is assuredly, a very strong feature in the case. For, if the religion for which these miracles are alleged, a religion of which, unquestionably, the evidence has been *deemed* convincing by the largest portion of by much the ablest men, who have lived since the age of its first establishment, be not, notwithstanding this, altogether unworthy attention, *equally* unworthy of it as are the common superstitions of Paganism, this discriminates immediately the Jewish and Christian miracles from

^a Pages 160, 161.

all those which have been or are alleged anywhere for any insignificant or improbable purpose. If Judaism and Christianity, whether true or false, be not *futile* : if Judaism, the oldest religion on record ; if Christianity, a religion which has long overspread all the more civilized and intellectual world ; cannot be pronounced fables of the same incredible class with the fables related of Osiris, or Jupiter : it is certain that the mere fact that the Scripture miracles are brought to attest that only religion which is so discriminated from all other religions, gives a probability to the miracles brought to attest it, in which other miracles must be ever deficient. For in whatever degree it be even supposable, that God may have interfered to attest a religion, it is equally supposable that those miracles may be true, which are brought to attest, and may be the only means of attesting it. And this consideration, though it does not disprove any miracles which may be alleged to have taken place on other, however trifling, occasions, yet confers on the miracles of Judaism and Christianity, a probability of which all others are destitute. So entirely absurd is the

strange assertion of Hume^a, that though other miracles may be capable of proof, it is still reasonable to reject all those miracles which are alleged in evidence of any system of religion. But these are pre-eminently the most entitled to credit, the evidence of a religion being, perhaps, the only knot which can be accounted worthy of this solution.

That the Christian religion does possess in reality this superiority over every other ; or at least that a system, of which it is the distinguishing character, that God was in the world, even while the world knew him not, and that for corrupt man he has appointed a method of reconciliation, and such a method as that which the Scripture details to us, cannot seriously be affirmed to be so absurd a system that no evidence can render it credible ; is a proposition which must be referred to doctrinal expositions of the reasonableness and consistency of the faith we profess. In a treatise on miracles it is a proposition *assumed*^b.

^a Essay on Miracles, pp. 178, 179. Essays, Vol. III. Ed. 1770. See the whole passage.

^b See Note K at the end of the volume.

In assuming this proposition, we assume one of those points which was stated originally as a preliminary condition of our just reliance on all miraculous authority^a. The other of those points was, that the authority of the miracle be not met by any express refutation on any other equal or superior authority. But any express authority which may be set against miracles must of necessity be the authority of opposite miracles. And since it will not be pretended that there are any *real* miracles, which are both opposed to ours, and also compete with them in evidence, we thus establish rigidly the whole proof of our case. We have shown it to be certain that the miracles of Scripture are works which carry with them a superhuman authority; and we now take them out of the range of that objection which, if either the doctrine were inconsistent with reason, or the authority expressly refuted, might justly deny even to a superhuman agent the credit of a sanction truly divine.—Indeed we do more: for in whatever degree we prove our doctrine to be *more* than credible, or to be *probable*, in the same degree

^a Chap. I. p. 52, and also p. 194 of this Section.

we also increase the *facility* with which it is sustained by its miraculous evidence.

This last point may require some farther illustration, and the rather because we may perhaps here meet with the objection, that to introduce in any degree the probability of the thing taught, as an element of the credibility of the miracles brought to attest it, is an incorrect and illogical process ; that it is a proving of the doctrine by the miracle first, and then of the miracle by the doctrine afterwards.

But I answer to this, that we do not thus adopt any such illogical process : that we do not adduce the probability of the doctrine as affecting in any degree the proper strength of that testimony which we allege for the truth of the performance of the miracle ; but only as increasing the capability of the thing taught to be sustained or supported by that same testimony.

Nor is this mode of proceeding by any means peculiar to this particular case, in which the question is that of the evidences of religion, but

is also adopted in almost all questions whatever, which the human faculties can be applied to discuss, as one of the best recognized laws of evidence. It is a fundamental principle that no testimony whatever can establish any known or clear contradiction to any truth already certain and allowed. It has already been shown^a that all vehement improbabilities approach to the nature of such contradictions. Supposing the evidence a known and definite power, every greater degree of improbability is justly and strictly to be accounted a greater weight which that one and the same power has to sustain: and though some powers are equal to sustain enormous weights, yet if we allow any case to be once brought into question, we are entitled to argue that the less the weight, or the greater the probability, the more constantly and certainly it may be sustained. Thus the same evidence on which we credit a probable, we habitually distrust for an improbable, story. Byron's account of a race of giants in Patagonia, was discredited even on its first publication, by persons who certainly never thought of doubting that he had really anchored on the coast of that country. We

^a See Ch. I. pp. 65—81.

have both parts of the relation on the same authority; yet the authority, which is equal to prove the probable, is not equal to sustain with the same assurance the improbable part of it.

So also as to miracles: and on the very same principle. And it is particularly to be observed with regard to almost all doubtful miracles, or miracles with regard to which men keep their judgments suspended, that some apparent probability possessed by those miracles is commonly the sole reason which operates to prevent their absolute and perhaps universal rejection.—For an example of such miracles we may take the story of Brennus, as related in Justin, Chap. xxiv. a story which Prideaux seems to have thought really miraculous^a, and which Warburton, though on the whole he thought it a fable, yet regarded as possessing much more claim to attention than the ordinary wonders of heathenism^b.

The story is this: that in the invasion of Greece by the Gauls, Brennus, satiated with the pillage of Macedonia, and delighting to indulge in a profane mockery of the gods, determined

^a Connection, vol. ii. fol. pp. 20. 22: quoted in Warburton's Julian, pp. 288, 289.

^b Warburton, *ibid.* and p. 287.

to plunder the Temple at Delphi. He accordingly marched with his army on this his last expedition. But “on his approaching the place there happened a terrible storm of thunder, lightning, and hail, which destroyed great numbers of his men, and at the same time there was as terrible an earthquake, which, rending the mountains in pieces, threw down whole rocks upon them, which overwhelmed them by hundreds at a time.”^a Brennus was wounded, and with the impatience of a barbarian, put with his own hand an end to his life : and the remnant of his army, retreating hastily from Greece, is said to have been annihilated by hunger and cold, by fatigue, and watchings, and by the hostility of the nations through whose territories they had to march before they could arrive in their own country^b.

^a Prideaux, *ibid.* “*Præsentiam Dei et ipsi statim sensere : nam et terræ motu portio montis abrupta Gallorum stravit exercitum, et confertissimi cunei non sine vulneribus hostium dissipati ruebant. Insecuta deinde tempestas est, quæ grandine et frigore saucios ex vulneribus absumpsit.*” Justin, l. xxiv.

^b “*Quo pacto evenit ut nemo ex tanto exercitu, qui paullo ante fiducia virium etiam adversus Deos contendebat, vel ad memoriam tantæ cladis superesset.*” Justin, *ibid.* ad finem. See note L at the end of the volume.

This is the story, and of this story it is to be remarked that the testimony on which it rests is by no means greater than that which is to be alleged for many contemptible fables. It is the same as to the miracles of Ecclesiastical history. If they be not all fables, which I do not affirm that they are, yet none of the true can be alleged to rest on *testimony* in any degree stronger than that of some of the false. It is plainly therefore the probability which in each of these cases determines us to give to the testimony the decisive weight which we may think it deserves. In the case of Brennus, the whole weight of the evidence depends on the probability that although an idol be nothing^a, yet the true God may be supposed likely to interfere to punish the principle of insulting impiety, even though in a case where the direct insult was offered to idols^b. But

^a 1 Cor. viii. 4.

^b “ Thus was God pleased, in a very extraordinary manner, to execute his vengeance upon those sacrilegious wretches for the sake of religion in general, how false and idolatrous soever that religion was, for which that temple at Delphos was erected.” Prideaux ubi sup. and compare Warburton’s Julian, pp. 291, 292.

for this probability it would have been at once rejected as futile.

In the Ecclesiastical miracles the argument is the same. If we admit any of them, we admit them partly on the ground of their correct analogy to what we know, or suppose, of the course of nature, or of the order of Providence. This, in other words, is only the ground of their probability: and thus it becomes evident that the probability of the doctrine affirmed has naturally and reasonably a great effect in prevailing on us to admit the proof of a miracle, and that the miracles of Scripture take the firmer hold of the mind, because its doctrines are, as we contend, eminently probable, exactly coincident with what we know from nature of God, and with what we know of the moral faculties of mankind.

It is possible that all persons may not be able to appreciate this probability. But as, in that most just argument for the existence of God, which we derive from the common consent of mankind, we do not disallow the great mass of this evidence, because there may have been some few persons too ignorant to know, or too vicious to be disposed to believe in him, so also as to the probability of the Christian religion. There may

be many minds too much imbruted in sense, there may be many too much vitiated by pleasure, and many others too conceited and overweening, to be able to discern the just claims of a religion, which calls on man to be wise and holy, which teaches him that in his relation to God, he must abjure the feeling of self-dependance, and bring every thought into obedience to Christ. But if these very ends be the best moral ends of religion, its having these ends is in fact its highest probability. And the goodness or probability of these ends is to be judged of, not indeed by the prejudices of a Christian education, however salutary some of those prejudices may be, but still less by the known prejudices of vice, by brutal ignorance, or by proud impiety. In every nation, and in every age, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is the judge of the probability of the Christian system, in the degree in which its merits can be laid fairly before him : and that persons of this class are they who account it most probable is, I believe, a fact which it would be quite idle to deny.

It therefore is evident that the probability of our religion, supposing that we substantiate that

probability, must weigh as an argument of the reality of those miracles which we find brought to attest it. Nothing, I think, can be more indisputable than this conclusion: nothing more certain than that the Christian religion possesses, to every unprejudiced eye, which is able to take in all its pretensions, the highest probability of a divine original.

Let none suppose, however, that any eye of man can fully appreciate that probability. Much, doubtless, we may see, and may see clearly: but we have still to argue that we see not the whole. We have still to argue that there may, and must be, much truth, and of this kind are many of the truths of revelation, which are far from being included in what we may learn merely from nature. We have still to argue that much caution is necessary in pronouncing what is, or is not, probable, and that there may be danger lest a doctrine which some are inclined to call "foolishness," as deeming it inconsistent with reason or nature, may only be inconsistent with some erroneous theory of Plato's, or perhaps Epicurus's school.

We have still to argue also, that though, if any charge of *improbability* be brought against

any of the Christian doctrines, the Christian is bound to defend himself against the charge, yet *if* the Christian can prove a miracle on his side, the disproof of the improbability falls not properly on him, but the proof falls on the party alleging it. It is the business of that party to prove or to substantiate the charge which he so alleges. The proof of the miracle throws the presumptions on our side. And though Christian writers feel that interest in their great cause, which often induces them, for the sake of precluding objections, to take on themselves the proof of the probability of the Christian doctrines, or of their consistency with those of natural religion, yet it may be worth remembering that, in the natural order of controversy, it is not their business, supposing miracles once proved, to go on themselves to prove that consistency, but that it is the business of their adversaries to prove the contrary.

Nor let any one think that in thus speaking of the probability, which we contend to belong to the Christian religion, as one of the ingredients of our complete reliance on its miracles, I am putting too much on the proof of that probability. The miracles are the proof; they con-

stitute that proof at least which alone I have undertaken to propose and explain. The probability is introduced only to show of the doctrine that it is in itself highly capable of being sustained by that proof.

But I should act unfairly towards a justly efficient part of our whole evidence, if I did not here add, that though to the Jews and Gentiles of old the religion appeared not, and, I am fully persuaded, was for wise purposes not intended to appear, in a highly probable form, and though its peculiar doctrines may to the modern unbeliever appear also to be improbable, yet I believe those doctrines to be not only so far probable as to be supported readily by external evidence, but also to be in themselves a cornerstone of its strength. I even believe that the *probability* of those doctrines possesses with persons able to estimate it, and not impeded by any hostile prejudices, the reasonable weight of a *miraculous* authority. They cannot have that weight certainly with those who think them not probable. But if their analogy to any principles of our nature, which do not lie perhaps on the surface, but which the pious man recognizes on self-examination, can be proved *to him* to argue

a depth of penetration into the moral nature and character of the human mind, which, under the circumstances in which we find it displayed, could not have proceeded from uninspired authority, the proof *to him* is what I have stated it. The probability of the system is then *to him* a no less evidence of its truth, nor a less just and rational evidence of it, than the internal evidence of the Gospel morality as compared with the moral principles of the age which produced it. In truth, I believe that this evidence, which is so furnished by the *religious* system which we find revealed in the Gospel, is really stronger than that of its *moral* purity.

Experience also proves that this is the fact, that though miracles may, on the promulgation of a religion, be the evidence best fitted to rouse attention, and though they afford the most obvious and most demonstrative proof of it ; yet among all persons able justly to estimate the real nature and true merits of Christianity, the character of its doctrines, and their adaptation to the human mind, to its wants, its weaknesses, and its whole moral constitution, are commonly what constitute their most efficient conviction. Nor does this rest on any less rational principle,

than that on which, in all sciences, *the proficient* is always allowed to establish for himself principles not wholly comprehensible by those who are acquainted with only the ruder outline, or the grosser elements, of the subject which he undertakes to examine.

CHAPTER III.

THAT THERE IS NO SUCH EVIDENCE IN BEHALF OF IM-
POSTURE.

I THINK it must be allowed even by the Deist himself, that the foregoing evidence is exceedingly strong : that if it stood by itself, no objection to it could be raised : and that the only objection to it is that it does not stand by itself ; but that false pretensions to miracles have been common in almost all ages and countries, especially in the unenlightened and remote ; and that the miracles of Christianity, though no doubt remarkable instances of the force and efficacy of vulgar credulity, are only similar to other instances of the same kind which we always reject without hesitation. And here we are told of the cow speaking in Livy, of the numerous prodigies which are related by Herodotus, of the pretensions of Alexander the Paphlagonian impostor, as described to us, or rather as ridiculed by Lucian^a, and of many other

^a Hume's Essay on Miracles, Part II.

fables both ancient and modern, which, though now sunk in universal discredit, have at various periods obtained the popular belief, and even the suffrage of grave and honest historians. If these, though false, or rather if any one of them, is equally evidenced with the Scripture miracles, the Scripture miracles, it is said, cannot be known to be true. If falsehood can produce any equal evidence, our evidence cannot be decisive.

And this we admit: this, if substantiated, is beyond all doubt a valid objection, and is indeed, I may perhaps say, the only one, which, among all the objections to miracles, has in it any show of reasonableness or honesty. But to this I answer, that the miracles of Christianity (over and above the reasonableness of the cause in which they are alleged, which, as has been already shown^a, is a strong point in the case) are not similar in this respect to any false miracle; or that there is no false miracle which is attested by similar, that is, by equal, evidence. The way to prove this is by selecting, as well as we can, among notorious, or among allowed impostures, some one or more cases of those which

^a Chap. II. § VI.

seem to have the best evidence, and then by showing how the evidence of the Scripture miracles exceeds, or differs from, that of these impostures.

Two previous cautions, however, are plainly necessary to be observed ; the one that the case selected be a case in which the act asserted to have been performed is an act clearly above the power of man ; the other that the relation be confessed an imposture. These cautions are requisite, because some acts not miraculous may yet be regarded as such by ignorant men, and because it may be contended that other miracles may be true, besides those which we find recorded in Scripture. To foretel an eclipse has been esteemed a miraculous power : and the person foretelling it may have used for purposes of deception, the influence which this power obtained for him : but no example of this kind can be alleged to depreciate any really superhuman power or skill.

So in the other case : suppose some stories of ghosts to be something more than mere credulities ; or suppose true miracles to have been worked at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, or at the shrines, if they may be so called, of the earlier

martyrs :—If these be true, if they can be proved in evidence, it is not necessary, in order to substantiate the Scripture miracles, that the Scripture miracles should be at all discriminated from these. And though the evidence for these is very imperfect, and though, *for other reasons*, it may be very desirable to disprove them, it were absurd to imagine that the holding them to be true could neutralize our proof of the superhuman origin of the Scripture miracles. No doubt the asserting a false miracle as true is naturally of very dangerous consequence ; since all persons who, either from ignorance or prejudice, are incapable of studying the subject attentively, will be inclined to reject the true together with the false. Yet we cannot imagine that the primitive Christians, or those modern Romanists, who have doubtless given credit to many supposititious miracles, were therefore unable to appreciate those of the Scripture. Nothing can destroy our proof of a true miracle, except to show that there is equal proof of a falsehood, or equal proof of some fact or some doctrine, which is in some way inconsistent with what we affirm.

But to proceed with my subject. It is now my business to show, in reference to some

supposed, or some real imposture, which may be selected as rivalling in point of evidence the Scripture miracles, that the Scripture miracles are clearly discriminated from it: that either the thing done, and imposed on the world as miraculous, is not a really superhuman performance, or that there is not that evidence of its having been really done, which we have for the performance of the Scripture miracles.

I. The first set of cases, of which it is my purpose to speak, is of those in which it would be unreasonable to deny the real performance of the facts alleged, but in which we still want evidence that the facts so alleged cannot be accomplished by human power, or are contrary to those laws which man can deduce or verify from his own observation and experience of nature.

Of all these cases, the cures performed at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, are doubtless among the most remarkable. But it has been proved so completely^a that the sole influence of the imagination, when acted on by all those powerful motives which affected the patients who frequented the tomb, is fully equal to all the effects

^a See in particular Leland, Douglas, and Paley.

there produced, that these cases will, I presume, scarcely be again urged, as of a nature comparable with those of the Gospel. The frauds of Mesmer, and of his brother impostors, who propagated the delusion of Animal Magnetism, show also in the same manner the same facility of producing, by merely working on a highly raised imagination, very remarkable physical effects, of causing or curing certain bodily disorders. If we add the excitement of religious enthusiasm, we have no cause to wonder that a bold and skilful impostor, or that a sincere bigot to his opinion, or his party, should be able so to avail himself of effects thus produced as to be accounted by the vulgar a worker of miracles, and not only by the vulgar, but also by all persons not fully aware of the great natural power which the mind in many cases possesses over the body. But then all these instances, in which effects, which may be justly referable to the mere force of the imagination, are or may be claimed falsely as being miraculous, disturb not the miraculousness of those cases in the Scripture history, with which the imagination can have nothing to do.

We read on an authority which seems wholly

indisputable^a, that the garrison of Breda in the year 1625 was cured of a most dreadful and inveterate scurvy, by mere faith in a remedy which they believed to have been sent to them by the general whom they idolized, Prince Maurice of Orange. The effect produced might have been at least equally surprising, if the *faith* producing it had been not military, but religious.—And if any one concludes that such relations might throw doubt on the miraculousness of *some* of the Scriptural miracles, I do not wholly reject the conclusion so drawn. We have still, indeed, this distinction with regard to the Scriptural miracles, that there is nothing in them *tentative*, nothing precarious^b. The effects of the imagination, though often exceedingly powerful, are yet in the highest degree irregular and uncertain. In those sorts of cases in which it is most efficacious, many individuals are inaccessible to its influence^c. Where it has worked cures, the cures are commonly temporary: the patients relapse into their former

^a See note M at the end of the volume.

^b See p. 60. et sqq.

^c Encyclop. Brit. art. Magnetism Animal.

state of disease^a. But in the miraculous cures which are related in Scripture we have not the least trace of any such imperfection. We have very strong evidence, or at least very strong presumptions, that no attempt of our Saviour or his Apostles to work miracles failed of success, through any *impracticability* of the subject on whom they operated, or that any of the cured ever relapsed. It is scarcely possible that if there had been but one failure, we should not have heard of it.—And undoubtedly, this *certainty* in all the Scriptural cases, in which the disorder cured is a disorder of that species, in which the influence of the imagination is often found to produce extraordinary effects, greatly distinguishes them from those *uncertain* effects which mere imagination seems to produce naturally.

Still I allow, however, that this class of miracles, the miracles, for example, of healing the lame and the paralytic, do lose much of their own specific or proper evidence, in consequence of our being able to produce cases apparently similar of cures effected by the natural power of the imagination. Accordingly, it was ad-

^a Paley's Evidence, Part ii. Chap. 11. p. 379, 380.

mitted^a, with regard to this class of miracles, that it depends for its evidence on other miracles which are indisputable. Those others, as the giving of sight to the blind, the feeding of the five thousand, the raising of Lazarus, and the miraculous darkness which took place at the crucifixion, were of such a nature that they could not possibly have been produced by any enthusiasm or illusion of the imagination.

Of all those cases in which the influence of the imagination has produced effects which may be brought into comparison with true miracles, some of the strongest, and these vouched by the very best evidence, may be found in the history of a very adroit contrivance which was employed, about twenty-five years ago, to refute a delusion of the nature of Animal Magnetism. It was at that time pretended, that, in many disorders, very extraordinary cures were effected by the use of *metallic tractors*, slight bits of metal tapered to a point at one end, and drawn gently over diseased parts of the body. Though exploded superstitions are in general soon forgotten, many persons must

^a Pages 123, 124.

recollect that, in order to repress this delusion, which had become very general both in England, and on the Continent, and still more so, if I do not mistake, in America, several very intelligent medical practitioners (perhaps on a hint supplied by the story of Mesmer^a), tried the experiment of using tractors made of wood, which were found to have precisely the same effect as the metallic. The mode in which these wooden tractors were used was, first, to excite in the person to be operated on, as much *medical faith* as possible, to relate the cures performed by this remedy, "to converse on the discoveries of Franklin and Galvani, laying much stress on the power of metallic points attracting even lightning, and conveying it to the earth." "In fact, it was often necessary to play the part of a necromancer, to describe circles, squares, triangles, and half the figures of geometry upon the part affected, with the small ends of the tractors."^b In one case a palsied limb is restored: in another the pulse is raised

^a See note N at the end of the volume.

^b Essay on the Imagination, as a cause and as a cure of the disorders of the body, by J. Haygarth, M.D. 1801, pp. 4, and 16.

to 120^a. Many other instances such as these are also recorded, in which the effects produced are either similar or the same, almost equally remarkable in all essential particulars, and equally supported by the most unequivocal testimony.

It is equally certain also that, in every one of these cases, the power of the imagination is the real power employed. No one will argue that to touch gently the skin, and this for the space of two, or three, or four minutes, with two pointed bits of mahogany, can of itself have power to restore a palsied limb, or to raise the pulse to 120. And this is the plainer because the practice was found inert, whenever adopted in the case of infants, or of horses, cases inaccessible to all influence of the imagination^b.

These examples may, I think, serve adequately to exhibit the powerful influence of mere imagination on the human frame. That there are none still stronger I, indeed, would not contend. I willingly allow that a *religious* delusion

^a See note O at the end of the volume.

^b Haygarth, pp. 10—12.

might possibly produce even still greater effects. No other impulse is, I believe, so powerful as religion, and no mere artifice can excite so thorough a conviction as may be produced by the infection of a sincere enthusiasm^a. Accordingly, it is notorious that convulsions and epilepsies, the most violent agitations of which our frame is susceptible, are only the common issue of those excessive excitements, to which ignorant fanaticism will often work itself up; and that, when fostered by numbers or by sympathy, these morbid affections are among the most contagious diseases^b. Nor is it reasonable to deny that the same powerful principle may often produce equally remarkable cures^c. Many of those cures which are accounted miracles by the enthusiast, and which are perhaps discredited by many of those persons who too much condemn the folly of enthusiasm to appreciate suf-

^a Haygarth, pp. 36, 37.

^b Lavington's *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compared*: Part III. 8vo. p. 23 and 175. and Lucian quoted p. 183. The stories of the Bacchæ and Corybantes must also be accounted for, at least in part, on the same principle.

^c Wesley's *Journal*, quotes Warburton on Grace, vol. i. 12mo. pp. 137—139.

ficiently its operation and power, may not be less real than they are remarkable, and yet may consist entirely in the natural influence of the powerful feelings roused into action.

I allow it to be possible, therefore, that the physical effects of some religious delusions, effects which may be either injurious or salutary, may be even more considerable than those of the cures which have been related as examples of a merely medical faith. But, in all cases whatever of religious delusion, it is so difficult to come at the true character of the fact, so hard to distinguish what may really have taken place from what has been added by the wilful fraud, or the willing belief, of the witnesses, that I know not where to find among those cases, any clear instances of the specific extent to which the mere influence of the imagination will reach. The instances which have been given must undoubtedly bring us so near to the extreme limits which that influence may possess, as to enable us to determine whether it can be equal to the performance of such miracles as those recorded in Scripture.

To this question we may answer assuredly in the negative. That to cause or cure certain spasmodic diseases, to cure the rheumatism, or

any disorders of the nerves, is an equal evidence of superhuman agency with those miracles which have been so often alleged already as among the most incontestable of those performed by our Saviour, no reasonable being will ever think of arguing.

II. So much, then, for the cases in which, though the fact be admitted, we may contend that the evidence of its being a fact really miraculous, is by no means comparable with that evidence which we possess in the case of the Scripture miracles. I now come, therefore, in the second place to those cases, in which, if we suppose that the fact be related accurately, we cannot contest the miracle; but in which the evidence of the fact is defective, compared as before with that of the Scriptural miracles.

The case which I would here allege, by way of example, is that of the much and often controverted miracle, which is said to have frustrated the attempt made by Julian to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem. The particulars of the story have been related already^a, and it has been clearly shown that, supposing the truth of those particulars, their miraculous nature cannot reasonably

^a P. 70.

be denied^a. The *evidence* of the story is what we have now to consider, the evidence that those particulars have been truly related to us, that there is no material error in the report of the facts.

Now, certainly, this evidence appears at first sight to possess almost all imaginable marks of credibility. The fact asserted is "that when the work was begun," a work in the prosecution of which the emperor had determined to spare no pains or expense, "terrible balls of fire broke out from the foundations, and made the place inaccessible, and upon many repeated endeavours slew the workmen, so that the fire never ceasing to rage whilst any attempt was made to go on with the work, the undertaking was laid aside."^b That a fact which, if true, must have been of so much publicity, which must necessarily have been regarded with so much earnest attention both by Jews and Christians, and by the heathen enemies of both, should, if false, be asserted by many contemporary, and repeated by many succeeding writers, and this without any apparent doubt of its reality, is doubtless a very remarkable circumstance. It is related at length by Nazianzen,

^a P. 70.

^b Jortin's Remarks, II. 322.

and Chrysostom : it is referred to by Ambrose : and, what is of all most remarkable, it is related also, without any the least apparent suspicion, by Ammianus Marcellinus, a heathen historian, of an exceedingly honest and respectable character^a. Later Christian writers adopted the story as true. No sort of denial of it appears to be any way traceable either in the numerous writers of the fourth century after Christ, the period at which it was said to have taken place, nor yet in any other ancient writer whatever : nor does it appear to have been questioned till after the revival of letters, or till a period of more than a thousand years had elapsed, in which we may suppose it to have possessed an uncontested belief. Add to this also that the occasion of the miracle was an occasion which, above all others, might seem to challenge the intervention of the God of the Christians, and that we cannot possibly, therefore, assert it to be alleged in an unworthy, or in itself an improbable, cause.

All this evidence, no doubt, deserves serious attention. It is, I suppose, to this day generally credited among Christians. It is evidence which led Moyle, a man of much penetration,

^a Lardner, VIII. 377. 382.

to forbear the rejection, which he was inclined otherwise to have made, of all miracles since the days of the Apostles^a: and we know that Warburton, the most powerful of advocates, has espoused and defended it with his usual vigour. Indeed, I hardly know that there exists anywhere in history any *questionable* relation whatever, for which the evidence can be justly accounted more powerful.

Whether this evidence be, or be not, decisive, is however of no import in that particular enquiry which is the occasion of its being here brought under consideration. If the story be a fable, yet if we can find no other fable supported by ampler, or more undeniable testimony, and can show at the same time that the miracles of Scripture rest on testimony stronger still; the fabulousness of that story, so supported, can throw no discredit on those Scriptural miracles which are shewn to rest on the stronger body of testimony.—If the story be true, that is, if we think that the evidence for it ought justly to be accounted insurmountable, the still stronger evidence which we are

^a Moyle, quoted in Jortin's Remarks, II. 31.

prepared to show for the Gospel miracles must, of course, be regarded as still more insurmountable. It must also be manifest that it is much better to select an instance of a story which possibly, or even probably, may be true, than of a story which, if false, yet may not be affirmed on the strongest testimony ever given to falsehood. If the Scripture miracles rest on evidence even superior to that which is *necessary* to establish a similar truth, we cannot but conclude that they must be certainly true; but by proving our evidence superior only to that of a falsehood, we do not exempt it from being classed with *some* falsehoods, unless we can show also that there is *no* evidence of falsehood superior to that which we select to compare with it.

We have now to consider, therefore, in what respects, the evidence which we possess for the truth of this history, is inferior to that of the miracles of Christianity.

Here then, in the first place, though the transaction related purports to have been a transaction of great publicity, and performed under very remarkable circumstances, we have not the least evidence that the contemporary historians received their accounts of it from any thing more

than mere rumour. It is plain from their relations that they were not eye-witnesses: nor do they pretend to have seen any eye-witnesses: nor do they detail the particulars of that evidence of the fact, which, whatever it may have been, they thought entitled to credit.

After what was said on this subject before^a, it will not be supposed that I regard the examination of eye-witnesses, by the writer who gives us any report of a fact, or that I regard the detail of the full particulars, as in all cases necessary to prove the performance. If it can be proved, sufficiently, that they who received the fact as true, must have had sufficient means of examining it, that they must, if it were false, have been indisposed to admit it, and that they testified their conviction by making the greatest, and the most disinterested, sacrifices, we are entitled to presume that they did examine into the evidence, and their admission of it is a sufficient basis for ours.

But in this case of Julian we want all these presumptions. Christianity, now in the year ccclxiii. had already been under Constantine an established religion, was even now, though

^a Ch. II. §§ III. and v.

under a heathen emperor, far more powerful than the manifestly declining cause of Paganism. The Christian writers, who have given us their accounts of this miracle, may all of them have been predisposed to credit it : and, indeed, they have all of them impaired in some measure by their credulity any dependence we may have been inclined to place in their judgments^a. All *presumptions*, therefore, that they must have been cautious in examining the evidence of this miracle, of which they have transmitted to us the report, are as much *against* these ecclesiastical writers, as they are *in favour of* the Scripture historians. They have against them also the whole genius of their age, abounding, as it did, with fabulous miracles. We therefore, in this case, re-enter into the necessity of requiring that enumeration of all the particulars of the evidence, which we might have dispensed with, if all the presumptions had been on the other side. If Ambrose or Chrysostom, if Socrates or Sozomen, had, on the evidence of the defeat of Julian's attempt, forsaken the religion, or even the sect, in which they had been educated, and embraced doctrines which promised nothing but

^a Jortin's Remarks, II. 323.

persecution, we might then presume that they must diligently have scrutinized, and would not have admitted, except on diligent scrutiny, all that evidence which had led them so to act. But to compare their mere hearsays, or what we know not to have been any thing better ; to compare their adoption of a story which they may have been prone to believe ; to compare this with that accumulated evidence, not only of eye-witnesses, but also of martyrs, which is given in Scripture to the miracles of our Saviour ; is not less absurd than to compare the visions of a delirium with the watchful investigations of mathematical truth.

To one very remarkable part of the evidence these observations certainly do not apply, namely to the testimony given by the heathen Marcellinus, a writer who is, no doubt, exceedingly free from suspicion, and of whom, as a heathen, it is not to be supposed that he could have felt any *proneness* to believe in a *Christian* miracle. What, it may be said, but the incontrovertibleness of the fact, can have induced a *heathen* to admit such a relation ?

To this I answer, that, if the relation be false, Marcellinus's admission of it is, no doubt, extra-

ordinary. Perhaps it is the only very extraordinary part of the story. But when we consider that there was nothing to prevent a heathen from believing even all the Christian miracles, without abandoning the creed, if it may be so called, of heathenism, there may not, perhaps, be so much difference as might be at first supposed, between this heathen and those Christian testimonies. That Moses wrought miracles was, beyond all question, the common belief of the ancient heathen nations^a. The servants of Ben-hadad are related to have said, that the gods of the Israelites “are gods of the hills, and therefore they were stronger than we.”^b But these heathen nations certainly never imagined that the admission of the fact that Moses worked miracles, or that this other admission that the God of the Israelites could give victory when the battle was in the hills, could carry with it as a consequence, that the religion of Moses must destroy the evidence of their own religions. They too had their own miracles, or at least their traditions, or they might think that in the valleys their own gods would be the stronger. Though hostile to the Jews, they might not look out for

^a 1 Sam. iv. 8.

^b 1 Kings, xx. 23.

traces of falsehood in any of their pretensions ; any more than in the Iliad we are bound to imagine that Diomedes, while under Minerva's protection, could not have believed that the rival deity Mars had espoused the cause of the Trojans.

In later ages we know that Rome itself incorporated the gods of conquered countries with its own*. Even in Rome itself very many persons might believe that the Christian miracles indicated absolutely a divine power or authority. Yet we cannot infer that they must have seen reason in consequence to become converts to the Christian religion. Christianity and heathenism, they would think, might still co-exist. It is scarcely to be doubted, also, that these opposite professions might have co-existed amicably, if the first Christians would have made the same concessions to heathenism, which the heathens were disposed to make to Christianity : if the Christians would have worshipped Jupiter and the gods, as readily as the heathens would have joined the worship of Christ to that of Jupiter. The charges of

* On the principle of *intercommunity* among the heathen religions, see Warburton *passim*.

Atheism, and of hatred of human kind, were brought against the Christians only because they would not do this. Their refusal to do this was the sole reason why our most holy faith was termed by heathens a pernicious superstition. Still, however, in its miracles, merely as miracles, or in the consequences which might be supposed to follow from those miracles, there seems to have been nothing which could excite in the opposite party any disposition to incredulity or distrust.

This being the case, even the testimony of a heathen to miracles said to have been worked in the Christian cause may not, *necessarily*, be a very strong testimony.—In the case too of Marcellinus, a candid and honest soldier, it does not appear probable from what we may observe of his character, and of the great fairness with which he often speaks of the Christians^a, that he was inclined to under-value any of their pretensions, or to distrust any assertion merely as theirs. Coupled as this character is with the entire certainty which we may feel that even the most splendid miracles might not seem to him

^a Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 371 note *p*, and p. 465.

decisive of the right of Christianity to supersede the worship of the gods, I am inclined to think that we have scarcely any presumption that, because he was a heathen, he must have sifted the evidence of this defeat of Julian's attempt to rebuild the Temple, more narrowly than he would have sifted any opposite story of any miracle performed by Jupiter or the gods. Rooted superstition has been observed almost in our own times to cling to fables of the very grossest description, in defiance of far stronger motives to question them, than any which Marcellinus can be supposed to have felt. There are even instances of persons accused of witchcraft, who have sincerely admitted the truth of the charge, and honestly believed themselves to be justly punished for the offence.

The admission by Marcellinus of the story in question is, no doubt, still very remarkable, and the more so, considering that he was an admirer of Julian^a, a resident at, and a native of Antioch^b, where the affairs of Jerusalem must have excited a particular interest, and that he accompanied Julian in his expedition into Persia,

^a Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 465.

^b Ibid. p. 464.

during which expedition this attempt must have been made, if in reality it was made at any time^a.—But still to compare this evidence with that of the Scriptural miracles, with the evidence of witnesses who sealed their testimony with their blood, and even of Jews, who were plainly averse to give it, can appear only folly to all who retain in their memories the particulars of that evidence which have been already detailed.—The testimony which has been adduced for the attempt of Julian to rebuild the Temple is, moreover, our whole proof on the subject. For to bring into the question the testimony even of Jews who did not write till a thousand years afterwards^b, is assuredly not adding any strength to the case.

We have now to enquire, if there be any opposite evidence, any thing to be set *against* this story of Julian :—for, if there be, we have thus another discrimination between the evidence of this history and that of the Christian miracles ; concerning which last it has already been shown^c that there does not exist any evidence in oppo-

^a Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 384.

^b Ibid. pp. 383. 392.

^c Chap. II. §. IV.

sition to them which can be thought to deserve the slightest attention.

Here then it is to be observed that it had been plainly Julian's design to defer the re-building "the holy city of Jerusalem till after he should have succeeded in the war with the Persians." He did not succeed in that war; he never returned from it: and the design was of a kind which is very often postponed, and of which the execution is very rarely anticipated^a. In his very latest writings, which, as we have reason to think, were composed on the eve of that period when, if at any time, he must have engaged in the attempt here in question, there exist passages which must, I think, be deemed wholly incompatible with his then entertaining any *immediate* plan of engaging in it^b. Jerom, a contemporary, says not anything on the subject. This eminent scholar was, at the death of Julian, a young man, he travelled over Palestine, and even lived long at Bethlehem, he *exults* in the triumphs of the Christian religion^c; he speaks of Julian as having pretended love to the Jews, he quotes Julian's writings, he ap

^a Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 384.

^b Ibid. pp. 385, 386.

^c Ibid. Vol. v. p. 74.

peals to the history of that war which had terminated in the overthrow of the Temple by Titus, he insists more than once on the ruinous condition in which the Temple had been ever since Titus and Adrian. And yet this very inquisitive and voluminous writer says nothing of any such attempt to rebuild it, and even calls its overthrow by Titus its *last* overthrow^a.

Other Christian writers also^b, from whom we might equally have expected a particular notice of so remarkable a history, are not less silent concerning it than Jerom himself. But it seems to be certain that, if true, they must have known it: if known, it is scarcely credible that they should not have mentioned it. What conclusions would not be drawn against Christianity, if similar presumptions could be justly alleged against the miracles which are recorded of Christ: or if merely, without any assignable cause, any eminent Christian writers of the first centuries had not ever mentioned, or ever alluded to them?

But the reason for this, it may be said, is the very disparate importance of the miracles of

^a Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 389.

^b Ibid. and 390.

our Saviour, and of this story of Julian. From this story of Julian, whether it be true or false, we cannot draw any material conclusions. From the miracles of Christ we draw the weightiest possible. There are weightier reasons, therefore, for relating these, or for alluding to them, than for relating or alluding to the story of Julian. Hence it may seem a fair inference that the silence of any writer as to the attempt of Julian to rebuild the temple, is not to be compared as an argument against its truth, with any supposed silence of early Christian writers, either as to the miracles affirmed of Christ himself, or as to any other important claims of miracles, which their subjects or their circumstances might naturally lead them to mention.

To this, however, I answer, that the point here to be considered is not by any means the real importance of the miracles, but the strength of the inducements which must have led the writers to speak of them. These inducements may not have been less in the case of Julian, supposing the story a true story which has been related of him, than in the case of the miracles of our Saviour himself, wholly incomparable, no doubt, as the cases are in real importance.

Farther than this, also,—I have not the slightest intention to contest the truth of this history of Julian, but only to argue that, on the supposition of its being false, this silence of Jerom, and other contemporaries, is one of the marks by which the actual evidence for it is discriminated from our evidence for the Christian miracles, concerning which our ancient writers are not silent; or else their silence is a silence which may be accounted for as the natural consequence of the fulness of their conviction, and so may be alleged even as an evidence of the reality of those facts themselves, of which they were fully convinced ^a.

I have to add, also, farther, that this miracle comes to us on far less evidence than the Christian miracles, because it is less connected with other facts, or with history. This story of Julian is of a mere insulated fact. True or false, there is nothing else which depends on it. But the miracles of Christianity, and we might say the same of those of Judaism, are the very hinge of the whole system. Setting aside the question whether they were performed or not, the belief

^a Chap. II. §. IV.

of those miracles is, beyond all doubt, one great principle or cause of its propagation. Deny the story of Julian, and the main series of history goes on still as before. Deny Christ's miracles, and you have still to explain how the belief of Christianity could be imposed on mankind : you have a chasm in history very difficult to fill, but which must be filled, if you would assign any cause at all of events which have, and have had for ages, a most considerable influence on human affairs.

This point of view, I may add, seems to me so important, that though we were to concede the validity of the whole claim made by Gibbon for the strength and efficacy of those mere human causes to which he ascribes the propagation of Christianity, I do not perceive that the just evidence of the religion would be materially weakened by that concession. To a certain extent Gibbon's argument is, no doubt, valid. It explains *much*, and it does not greatly matter *how much*, of the method used to effect the establishment of the religion. But the *germ* of the religion it leaves wholly unaccounted for, except on the supposition of those original miracles of which it has been the business of this

treatise to assert the performance. In truth in the work of this eminent historian there is but little, *in the way of argument*, which we need distrust on the ground of its unfairness towards the Christian religion. The disgrace and the mischief of its offence against religion consists almost wholly in the moral contagion of that sarcastic impiety which pervades it, and which, though each drop makes but a feeble impression, is from mere repetition dangerous in the extreme, and will often have even on the philosophical mind an effect almost mechanical.

From what has been said of Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple, that the insulation of the event is to be accounted a defect in the evidence for it, I may proceed to show also that this entire insulation of it is not only in some measure a defect in the specific evidence, but affords *some* presumption also that it is not a case in which it is probable that a miracle should be performed. Of our means of judging of what is probable with God we must doubtless speak always with the profoundest humility. Yet it has been shown already ^a, that the miracles of

^a Chap. II. §. VI.

Scripture possess undoubtedly the stronger claim on our attention, because they are performed in a highly probable cause. They all relate to that one great dispensation for granting to man the promise of immortality, which, if there be any cause, is certainly that cause in which we might expect that miracles would be performed. The miracles are numerous, and thus confirm one another. Even those, which might be in themselves regarded as trivial, are so connected with the most important and the best evidenced, that the reception of all becomes easy and natural.

Thus too, undoubtedly, this story of the repulse of Julian in an attempt to re-build the Temple of Jerusalem is far more probable, as being, if true, a miracle of Christianity, than it could have been accounted, if it had been a pagan miracle, even though the specific evidence for it were to be supposed, in both these cases, equal. The remarkable circumstances under which this miracle is said to have been wrought, to confound an attempt which was an actual challenge of the Almighty, and which set up against Christ that very Temple of Jerusalem, the peculiar sanctity of which it was one object of His mission to destroy, are among the

strongest probabilities of the truth of the story. Without them, indeed, we should reject it at once.—Also, if it had been related of the age of the Apostles, in which there seems to have existed a standing power of miracles; or if it were clear that after the age of the Apostles, and down to the year ccclxiii after Christ, the period to which this history is referred, miracles were wrought on other occasions, we might easily admit proof of this particular miracle. But if we believe, on the contrary, as perhaps we reasonably may, that an interval of three centuries had now elapsed without the performance of any credible miracle; the claim of a miracle on one insulated occasion, an occasion possessing not any discernible influence on the general progress or history of the religion, cannot but, at first sight, have an improbable appearance; must come to us on presumptions much less recommendatory than the presumptions exhibited by a body of miracles, the professed object of which is to give a sanction to doctrines of the most important nature imaginable, which reveal to man the glad tidings of salvation, and which guide his footsteps in the true way of attaining it.

But it is said that the occasion of the miracle here in question was in fact an occasion of the very greatest importance, an occasion on which, even rather than on any other, we might almost expect the Deity to interfere. The impiety of the challenge, the rank of the challenger, the apparent inconsistency with the whole scheme of Christianity that the Temple of Jerusalem should ever again be re-built, might induce us to think this pre-eminently one of those cases in which God would work a miracle "for his name's sake, that it might not be polluted in the sight of the heathen."^a

To this I say again, that I do not deny it. I dare not assert that God never interferes, or that he has never interfered since the establishment of Christianity, to inflict just judgment by a particular miracle, or to vouchsafe by the same medium some eminent mercy. But still impiety, it is to be feared, has always been so common, often so prominent, and this without incurring any other punishment except that inflicted in the ordinary guidance of God's providence, or in full consistency with the common course of

^a Ezekiel, xx. 22.

events, that I do not see that we can have in any case a *presumption* that it may be fit to punish it by extraordinary means.

With regard to the observation that it was most probably inconsistent with the whole intention or scheme of Christianity, that God should suffer the Temple to be rebuilt,—I ask what presumption can this observation afford that it might be proper to take *miraculous* means of defeating such an attempt? He who does all things might surely do this without a miracle. Julian had intended, no doubt, to rebuild the Temple. This intention, it is presumed, God would not permit to be executed. But Julian's intention was not to rebuild it immediately, but to rebuild it after his return from the Persian war. In that war he was killed, not three years after his accession, or after declaring his intention to rebuild the Temple; not six months after the period at which he is reported to have vainly made the attempt. If any one will conjecture that his death in the Persian war was a punishment which, though inflicted in the ordinary course of God's providence, was secretly designed by the same providence with a particular view to prevent his rebuilding the tem-

ple, a project which would naturally fall to the ground at his death, he makes a conjecture surely by no means improbable. Julian's intention might, so far as we are able to see, by this *natural* means, or by ten thousand others, have been intercepted. And though the truth of the fact depends not on such conjectures, but on the actual strength of the evidence which may be produced for the fact, or against it, yet where the end proposed *seems* so easily attainable without a miracle, and in the most ordinary course of things, it is too much to *presume* that any miracle was to be expected, especially a miracle which was to be prepared and preceded by a change in the original intention of Julian, which change only could create the occasion for it.

It follows from all this that the story in question stands on evidence which is wholly unequal to the evidence of the truth of the Scripture miracles; unequal both in the positive evidence which is capable of being adduced in proof of the performance, unequal in the proof of its reception as a fact really performed, and in the reasons also, or probabilities, of its being designed. The real or supposed falsehood, there-

fore, of any such story as this, discredits not in the least that incomparably stronger evidence which has been produced already for the Christian miracles. The falsehood of the weak affects not the strong. The objection to the evidence of the Christian miracles, which it has been in this chapter my sole business to consider, is that *equal* evidence may be produced in behalf of imposture. But if the evidence of, we may suppose, as strong a case as possible among all those which we may reasonably suspect of imposture, is shown to be wholly *unequal*, that objection is refuted at once.

I think it has been proved, therefore, as was proposed^a, both that the Christian miracles are clearly discriminated from all pretensions in which the thing done is not really a superhuman performance, and also that the evidence of their real performance is discriminated equally from all false affirmations of miracles which have not really been performed.

^a Page 225 et seq.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT THERE MAY BE REASONS, SOME OF WHICH ARE APPARENT IN THE NATURE OF THE RELIGION, AND OF THE SCRIPTURE COMPOSITIONS, WHY MORE OR STRONGER MIRACULOUS EVIDENCE WAS NOT AFFORDED; AND REASON TO DOUBT ALSO WHETHER ANY EVIDENCE OF TESTIMONY COULD HAVE BEEN STRONGER THAN THAT WHICH WE POSSESS.

It has now been proved fully that the miracles of Scripture are a decisive evidence of its divine authority. In the detail of this proof there is, I apprehend, no void left unfilled, and I need not again recapitulate that very abundant accumulation of circumstances which gives to this conclusion an irresistible force. It may still be remarked, however, as a point for farther inquiry, whether, notwithstanding the great apparent strength of this evidence, we yet might not have expected that more should be given. The revelation, it has been urged, might have been written in the clouds. The birth of our Saviour, which was announced miraculously to the shepherds, might have been proclaimed unequivocally.

cally in the court of the Areopagus, or in the Roman Forum ; as, indeed, it was feigned afterwards to have been declared to Augustus on his sending to consult the Oracle at Delphi^a. Our Saviour might have shewn himself after his resurrection to all the people, instead of only to his disciples ; or if not to all the people, yet not to his friends only, but also to his enemies, to Annas and Caiaphas, to Herod, or Pilate, or to some of the more eminent of the Scribes and Pharisees. All this, for any thing we know, might have been done, and we are apt to imagine that it would have added considerably to the evidence, great as it is, which we now possess. There is some reason to think that the earthquake and the darkness, which took place at our Saviour's crucifixion, were recorded in public acts or registers sent by Pilate to the emperor Tiberius^b. Why then are not even these very acts preserved to us, with formal attestations of the facts recorded in them ? How can

^a Me puer Hebræus, divos Deus ipse gubernans
Cedere sede jubet, tristemque redire sub orcum.
Aris ergo dehinc nostris abscedito, Cæsar.

Fontenelle. Hist. des Oracles, Ch. I.

^b Lardner, Vol. vii. 374.

we imagine that in a matter which concerns man's eternal salvation, the Deity, He to whom all things are easy, should not have given us, if the Scripture doctrines were truly his, the strongest evidence which the case admitted of being given?

To this it is to be answered, first, that to the Mosaic miracles this objection does not apply. Many of those miracles, if we admit them to be miraculous, and they are indeed in all respects not less strongly evidenced than the Christian, are miracles of so overwhelming a character that we can imagine none more striking or more august. The dividing the Red Sea, and God's speaking from Sinai, not to mention other instances, were miracles performed on the largest scale, and in the presence of most numerous and unimpeachable witnesses. And so also with regard to the miracles of the crucifixion. The earthquake, the darkness, the rending the veil of the temple, were all of them miracles the most impressive imaginable: and the early Christian writers dwell much on these events, more, as I apprehend, than they are dwelt on at present^a.

^a Lardner, Vol. VII. 372—386.

To the question, in general, however, why we have not stronger evidence, it has been answered^a, and with the greatest justice possible, that it is not for man, either in his contemplation of nature, or in contemplating the works of divine revelation, to give scope to his fancy as to what *might* have been done, as to what evidence *might* have been given, but only to observe and to discuss what *has been* done, that evidence which, in fact, *has been* given. It has been justly observed, that the supposed defect in the evidence is completely analogous to what the objector must also admit to be an equal and a similar defect in natural religion. It has been shown also “that irresistible proof might probably restrain men’s voluntary powers too much, might not answer the purpose of trial and probation, might call for no exercise of candour or humility, no previous desire to learn and obey the will of God; might leave no place for the admission of *internal* evidence, which ought, perhaps, to bear a considerable part in the proof of every revelation; might confound all characters, and all dispositions, might subvert, rather than promote the true purpose of the di-

^a Paley’s Ev. Vol. II. Part III. Ch. vi.

vine counsels, which is not to produce *obedience* by a force little short of mechanical constraint, but to treat moral agents agreeably to what they are; which is done when light and motives are of such kinds, and are imparted in such measures, that the influence of them depends on the recipients themselves.”^a

It has also been urged, and apparently with equal truth, that a more irresistible display of the evidences might not be “compatible with the activity of civil life, and with the success of human affairs.”^b Thus it may be clearly proved that in the very nature of the religion, there may be reasons why irresistible evidence ought not to have been either expected or given. Irresistible evidence, therefore, being out of the question, the sufficiency of that evidence which we possess becomes nothing but a question of *degree*, a question whether it be *sufficiently* ample or not. And this is to be determined only by examining its *adequacy* to support the doctrine which we seek to ground on it. If we prove that adequacy, we have no ground left to

^a Paley, *ubi supra*. I have found it convenient in the above quotation to compress some of the expressions, but without changing the sense.

^b Paley, *ibid*.

expect that more or stronger evidence should have been given.—That more *might* have been given is, of course, here supposed.

Yet it may be worthy of inquiry, whether, consistently with man's nature, and with those reasoning principles, which are his guides in matters of evidence, we can affirm it possible that any stronger evidence of the performance of the miracles recorded in Scripture *could* now be imparted to us. I will not deny that if a particular miracle were now to be worked for the satisfaction of an individual, or if the church still possessed a standing power of miracles*, this might be stronger evidence than any evidence can be which consists in record or testimony. But, supposing only that we have necessarily to depend on human testimony for the truth of the miracles which the Scriptures record, (and this is necessary without a particular miracle, or unless we were witnesses of a standing power of miracles,) I do not see that it is any way presumable that the evidence *could* have been greater than it now is.

First,—let it be supposed that our Saviour, after his resurrection, might have appeared not

* Paley, *ibid.*

only to his disciples, but also to his adversaries, to the Scribes and Pharisees, to Herod, or to the Sanhedrin. Suppose this, and then I do not deny that the evidence of the resurrection would have gone to *them*, to his contemporary adversaries, with greater strength than that evidence of testimony which they actually received. But it does not follow that that greater degree of evidence must also have communicated itself from them to us. Say that our Saviour had appeared to the Sanhedrin. He must either have convinced them of his resurrection, or not convinced them of it. If he had appeared without convincing them, no one will say that this had added to our evidence. But say that he did convince them, and convince the whole Jewish nation. It seems to me almost certain that if this had been done, there would not now exist, except possibly among Jews, a single believer in the divine origin of Christianity. Throughout the whole heathen world, Christianity was at first regarded only as being one of the Jewish sects. Had the Jews all come over to it at the time of our Saviour's resurrection, Judaism and Christianity must have continued inseparable. None would have been a Christian without be-

ing also a Jew ; and as Pliny and others contemned Christianity, because they accounted it a mere variety of Judaism, so, if identified in a still greater degree with that obnoxious religion, it might have been contemned universally throughout the heathen world. If, moreover, there remained any Jews unconvinced, I see not that their scruples would be *now* the less counted on, because they might be proved to have been only a small minority.

We too, ourselves, deriving, as we do, our greatest evidence for the real performance of the Christian miracles from the knowledge we possess that the original witnesses bore testimony to them in defiance of prejudice, persecution, and death, and that they were held to be undeniable even by Jewish *adversaries*, must have lost the whole of this our greatest evidence, if on our Saviour's resurrection, the Jews had become *friends*. We should have argued that the whole history was planned and concerted by the Jews, then, if not not before^a. Had the Jewish government concurred in doctrine with the apostles, we should have lost that seal and testimony of truth, which their deaths and persecutions stamp on their

^a Leland's Deistical Writers, Vol. i. p. 108.

characters: or if they had still encountered heathen persecution, we should have referred their zeal to their national Jewish fanaticism. Added to which, it is scarcely possible to suppose that if Jews and Christians had at our Saviour's death become united, the Jewish nation, which was ready at all times for rebellion, should not have rebelled against the Roman yoke. Such a rebellion, if it proved unsuccessful, would have operated as a slur on the novel doctrine of Christianity^a: and I may add, that if successful, a completion such as this of the Jewish prophecies by the restoration of the temporal power of the Jews, might not have been regarded as the fulfilment of a divine prophecy, but only as an event which had been caused or created by the natural stimulus of those prophecies themselves.

Again:—it may be objected that Divine Providence might have so ordered it, if the Christian miracles were really performed, that both heathen and Scripture writers should have transmitted to us much more ample particulars of the detail of the proof. To this I answer, that I am very far from affirming that this might not pos-

^a Leland, *ibid.* p. 183.

sibly have been done. I say not that our proof is the greatest imaginable of any that testimony might have been able to render,

But neither do I see clearly that a greater detail would have made it stronger than we have it at present. I know not how others may be inclined to think in the like case : but in reading the Greek orators, it almost always appears to me, whenever I come to those intervals of the oration, in which it is interrupted by the production of witnesses, that I am here come to a story got up for the occasion, and to which hardly any reliance is due. Nor, though the depositions themselves had been in these cases preserved, do I see that the evidence would have been more credible than it now is. In all remote questions, of which we ourselves are not cognizant, we estimate the weight of all such depositions, not by any regard to the degree of formality with which they are alleged or attested, but only, as appears to me, by the impression which they make on judges of whom we either know or presume, that they are able and willing to detect deceit or inaccuracy.

In reading the report of a modern trial, the most plausible story has little or no effect on us,

till we learn the impression which it made on the judge and the jury. And though the impression made on them may seem to us quite unaccounted for by any thing which we read in the report of the evidence, yet knowing, as we do, that no report can place before us those living characters, both of truth and of falsehood, which are often apparent in oral examination, we are seldom inclined even to suspect any error in the verdict of an able and unprejudiced tribunal. If the detail of the evidence adds any thing to our conviction, this is not, so far as our conviction is rational, because this detail proves directly the fact, but only as it proves that the judge and the jury had sufficient means of coming to an accurate determination. To a reader of the trial, therefore, the real proof consists, and consists alone, in the impression made on the judges to whom the fact was submitted, and consequently if we *know* that they would not decide, without having undeniable evidence placed before them, we have precisely the same proof that the evidence is undeniable, whether we have, or whether we have not, the detail of it.

From this, I think, it follows, that the evidence of the Christian miracles might not, though it

had been detailed and attested at length, and though conveyed to us by the most unimpeachable vehicles, have been in any degree stronger than we find it at present. We have enough of detail to prove, if proof can be necessary, that many judges, who, if the pretensions to miracles, which were set up by our Saviour and his apostles, were false pretensions, could not but have had sufficient means of refuting them, and who would have been very glad to have refuted them, if possible, were yet not able to allege any thing against them. We have sufficient presumptions also that even the Christians themselves would not have admitted them without sufficient examination. This being proved, the farther proof of their admission, and of the impression which they made both on Jews and Christians, proves all else for which we desire to contend.

Again : it was shown before^a that the writers of the Gospels, though on some few occasions they do seem actuated by the disposition to bring forward proof of the real performance of the Scripture miracles, yet do not appear to make this their primary end : that they are *more* studious to display the character, the goodness, the

^a Pages 148, 149.

glory, of our Saviour's miracles, than to *prove*, what they never doubted, nor yet apprehended as a point which would be seriously doubted in future, their real performance; that they often seem to assume this, rather than prove it; and that their language and manner in this case is a considerable evidence of the conviction which they felt of the undeniable truth of the miracles, and as such is an argument of its truly being thus undeniable.

If then this be so, greater detail of the proof might have done more to weaken that evidence which we collect from the comparative silence of the Christian writers concerning it, than it could have added to the proof in any other respect. If they had set themselves to *display* the proof of the performance, would it not be argued that they either anticipated or encountered some serious denial of it? And is not our argument concerning the miracles, that they were not seriously denied, a stronger argument than could possibly have been compensated by any detailed enarration of the evidence?

But it may be said that God's providence, though they were not denied at the time, must doubtless have foreseen that they would be de-

nied in future. In imperishable records, therefore, which we hold to have been written under the influence of the omniscient and prophetic spirit, we may still suppose it possible that something should be inserted, if not in reference to any scepticism of the age in which those records were published, yet in reference to that which was to spring up in future. This too I deny not : but neither can this be affirmed. It does not appear that there can be any principle of interpretation applicable to any relations of, or any argumentations concerning facts, except that of putting ourselves as nearly as possible in the circumstances of the relaters themselves, and of ascertaining by the help of learning and criticism, what must, at the time, have been their intention and meaning. If we had found in the Gospels any notice of, or observations on, our Saviour's miracles, which might be interpreted into a prospective reference to doubts or disputations which were to arise in subsequent ages, the inquiry into what must have been the meaning of the writers in making those observations, is an inquiry which must still have remained to us. Nor is it easy to say, *looking to the question of evidence*, that if they had used any expressions

which believers might interpret as being intended to obviate a *future* denial of the real performance of the miracles, unbelievers might not have powerfully contended that those expressions argued an *existing* denial of them, a denial, the absence of which may be a stronger evidence for the real performance or truth of the miracles, than any opposite evidence which could be brought against that denial, if there should be ground for thinking that it had been ever seriously made.

The only method by which it seems to me imaginable that stronger evidence than that which we have *could* have been transmitted, is to suppose that *more* than we now possess might have been preserved to us of the writings or arguments of the early adversaries of our religion, and that we found in those writings a denial of the miracles on grounds manifestly false and sophistical. If in such writings we could find no good ground for denying them, it might be thought the more presumable that there was none to produce; that there was none to produce even at that early period, when, if the miracles were not really performed, that evidence against them, which may now be supposed to have pe-

rished, could not but be accessible and notorious. But this again is, at best, only another argument *ad ignorantiam*. If, moreover, as we believe, the facts were not denied (and their not being denied is one part of our argument), is it clear that we should gain anything by having preserved a merely sophistical and feeble denial of them?

This very evidence, moreover, *is* amply preserved to us, perhaps from the first period at which it could possibly become a valuable attestation to the truth of the miracles. The first evident symptoms of any attempt to deny them (with the exception of the resurrection which we may here place out of the question) are to be found in Celsus as preserved to us by Origen. If any one can believe, while reading that treatise of Origen, that Celsus, at the period when he wrote^a, had valid evidence, or indeed, had any evidence at all, to produce against the miracles, no accumulation of evidence could inform or instruct a mind capable of such an imbecile belief; nothing, indeed, short of a particular miracle.

^a A. D. 176.

Perhaps it may be thought that the observations which have been here made on the great strength of the evidence for the Christian miracles may be incompatible with the principles of the former part of this chapter. If the proof come so very near to demonstrative, what becomes of the argument, that the moral ends of religion allow not of arming it with irresistible evidence, that much is intended to be left to the previous disposition, to the seriousness and candour of the person or persons to whom it is addressed or proposed?

To this I answer, that though I do suppose that the evidence of the real performance of the Scripture miracles is quite as demonstrative as any evidence of testimony can possibly be, yet that, in making our estimate of the strength of that evidence, full room may still be left for trial and exercise of the moral faculties of the mind. The proof, though decisive, is not completed but by a long and attentive derivative process. We have to prove, first, that the miracles performed must, if correctly related to us, imply a really superhuman power. We have to prove, afterwards, that a false pretence to such miracles *would not* have been made by the

persons asserting them, or *could not*, if made, have been imposed successfully on the world. This proof, however clearly it may be made out, yet involves an inquiry into almost the whole nature of man, into an extensive province of ancient learning and history, and into the correct transmission of the authentic documents of our religion from the age in which it was promulgated to our own. To make the whole conclusive of the divine origin of the religion which these miracles are brought to attest, it is, I believe, necessary to prove, also, that every act, which contains evidence of superhuman power possessed by the agent, confers, under certain circumstances, indisputable proof on all the doctrines which that agent delivers.

In all this process, though I believe it may be rendered infallible by giving careful heed to every part of it, there is ample room for both hope and fear to step in; there is room for the operation of all those sensual and all those arrogant feelings which indispose men either to the doctrine of a future state, or to submit themselves to the yoke of a crucified Saviour, which tempt them to introduce some fallacy into the chain of evidence, or to blind themselves pur-

posely that they may not be able to see it. In *moral* evidence, therefore, even though we suppose it infallible, yet if we do not, or cannot, arrive at the conclusion till after we have gone through a long series of proof, we may find a trial no less of the heart than of the understanding.

I should be much inclined, indeed, although here it is unnecessary, yet on the general principles of human nature and reasoning, I should be much inclined to advance a step farther, and to say that even in matters of exact science, where neither the facts nor the principles have properly any dependence on moral principles or evidence, and therefore ought not to be liable to the perturbations attending them, yet if the affections are at all interested in the conclusion, the process will often be liable to the same disturbance, to which it is allowedly and notoriously liable whenever the principles on which it depends are in themselves properly moral principles. I am sure that I have often seen men of sanguine tempers, men flattering themselves with having hit on a lucky discovery, no less eager to turn even mathematical principles to sustain an erroneous conclusion, no less

angry at seeing their error opposed, than the very same men would have been if the question at issue had been the truth, or the triumph, of any favourite dogma in the contested fields of politics or religion.

It may be here objected, however, that if it be the length of the process by which the truth of the Scripture miracles is deduced, which constitutes that process a moral trial of the mind, we must be compelled to hold that at the first step of that process, or at all events in the case of those who *saw* them performed, no moral trial could be found in it. But can we hold this consistently with the whole *rationale* of miracles? Can we possibly believe that events the most striking of all events in the history of our religion, and which indeed form so large a portion of its character, were not as much intended to call out the moral powers, and to excite the moral tastes and predispositions of those disciples with whom our Saviour lived, and for whose benefit and instruction we may think they were intended particularly, as to try the dispositions of future ages of mankind? And this the more especially, since our Saviour himself argues in many places on the denial of his miracles as

constituting a most culpable moral defect, and even speaks of it as being in one particular case the most unpardonable of all offences against God.

The answer to this objection^a is, that, though if *we* were to witness the performance of miracles like those of our Saviour, we might instantly conclude them to imply a divine authority, though *to us* this conclusion might seem so easy and certain that no moral error could impede our making it, yet the state of opinion was in our Saviour's time very different. To make the inference *then*, even from seeing the miracles, that they were the work of God, or at least carried God's authority with them, and that they were not the work of magic or of the devil, might, and did, require not less fairness of mind than is required in the present age to deduce fairly the whole evidence from the age in which they were performed to the present. The evidence of the *facts* was, no doubt, to the eye-witnesses more *irresistible* than it can be to modern inquirers; but the *inference* from the facts, that *logical* inference before spoken of, that all

^a See the Preliminary Dissertation.

exercise of superhuman power confers, under certain circumstances, infallible proof on all the doctrines which the agent delivers, the eye-witnesses were very unprepared to appreciate. They were unprepared for this in a degree at least equal to that degree in which they were prepared better than we can be to appreciate the evidence of the mere facts themselves.

This easy explication of the objection alleged, naturally suggests a very obvious corollary which, if I mistake not, affords a valuable exemplification of the consummate wisdom of God's dealings with man, and of the analogies between his moral and physical works. The objection assumes, I think, a most true proposition. Nothing, I believe, can be more certain than that the miracles of our Saviour were intended as a trial of the eye-witnesses themselves, as a moral trial of their genius and spirit, and that those miracles were not intended to overwhelm them with an actually irresistible evidence. But it would be hard to imagine that it could have been other than irresistible, if the principle, that miracles might be worked by magic or evil spirits, or at least that they did not always argue a divine authority, had not been current.

That this signal error therefore, the worst and greatest of all those which opposed the reception of our Saviour's doctrines, should have been generally current at the time when he lived, seems to have been absolutely necessary to allow even the reception of the miracles to answer one purpose, and that a great, certainly, and perhaps indispensable purpose, which they were, I think, beyond all doubt intended to answer. As other trials of faith have increased, that particular one has died gradually away, exactly in the analogy of those *contrivances* in physics, in which for the production of the same general end we see employed different, and even opposite methods, each often subjected to its own specific inconvenience, an inconvenience corrected by its own specific compensation, and this very diversity of arrangement having often some reason which we are ourselves able to trace^a. But no arrangement seems more strikingly providential than an arrangement by which the force of Christ's miracles was abated in its effects, at a time when it might have been *too* overwhelming to have the moral effect which it must have been intended to have.

^a See Paley's Natural Theology.

We know also that it was unsuitable to the divine counsels, and I think I have shown also that it might even have been prejudicial to the permanent evidence of the religion, if at its origin it had been established suddenly throughout the world. The existing misconceptions as to the necessary inferences from the supposed possession of miraculous powers may have been among the provisions for retarding its propagation accordingly. Those particular misconceptions have now gradually disappeared, have disappeared, at least, as to all practical effect, among the nations of western Europe, in the lapse of ages which has taken place since that time. Whatever men may think concerning the *theory* of miracles, and our power of excluding all error or deceit arising from the probable or possible intervention of any beings not absolutely divine, no one now dreams, I suppose, that such miracles as our Saviour's, granting the facts to have been performed as related, and granting the superhuman power exemplified in them, can argue anything less than a divine authority.

But then, as this inference that the miracles, if performed, must indubitably argue a divine authority, as this inference has become esta-

blished and evident, the *impression* of the real performance of the facts, or of the power evidenced in them being certainly superhuman, has, perhaps, grown fainter. I do not think indeed, as I have said, that the *proof* is impaired. But still, as has been shown^a, the *impression* made by the proof may be much less, even while the proof itself remains the same, or rather while it remains equal. We now, therefore, see constituted a different species of trial from that which existed under very different circumstances, each species that doubtless which is the best fitted by God's unspeakable wisdom for the differing circumstances of his moral creation, and each combining, as is apparent even to our feeble perceptions, both that moral trial which, according to the nature of the case, is an essential part of its intent and propriety, and also that wholly irrefragable, though not actually irresistible, proof of the miracles, which allows us to pronounce that they are certainly true, and cannot be doubted except by blindness or perversity.

^a See Ch. II. § v., and compare pp. 278, 279, 232.

CHAPTER V.

THAT IN PROVING THE TRUTH OF THE SCRIPTURE MIRACLES,
IT IS UNNECESSARY TO DRAW A STRICT LINE OF DISTINC-
TION BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE PRETENSIONS TO MI-
RACLES.

IN the preceding chapter it was allowed, and even argued, that though our proof of the Christian miracles is complete, yet we cannot arrive at it but by a deductive process, and on ground which requires or presumes the establishment of many critical and historical facts. That we have to go through such a process in the case of Christianity, a religion which occupies so large a space in the world, and which both by its own magnitude, and moral character, and by *our* position, must of necessity take fast hold of our attention, has not any thing in it to which objection can be made. This indeed, as is plain also from what has been said^a, is only a part of that moral probation or trial

^a See the preceding Chapter.

which we even venture to say that the evidence of a true religion may be expected, or *ought*, to include.

But it may be here objected that this process demands of us to enter into enquiries very complicated and difficult, and which human faculties are indeed unequal to undergo. One part of the process consists in establishing the fact that no falsehood can be found supported by equal evidence. But this, if provable, it will be said, must be proved in one of two ways : either by laying down a principle of exact discrimination, by which truth and falsehood may be always known from each other ; or else by examining *all* cases that can be found. But to lay down such a principle of exact discrimination between truth and falsehood is plainly impossible. In all cases of fact, the evidence goes to a jury, who can never be expected, nor indeed be able, to say exactly where stands that hinge on which its truth or falsehood depends. It is equally impossible also to examine *all* cases in which the claim of miracles has been falsely pretended. We can examine but few cases, we can know of but few, compared with the multi-

tude of all those claims of miracles which have been made during the long history of mankind. If then, it will be said, we know not *all* cases, or if, of any of those cases of which we know something, we possess only loose or imperfect accounts, how can we presume from our partial observations to think of drawing a universal conclusion. There may be falsehoods better evidenced than any we know of. There may be stronger cases than any which have been adduced, cases which may be set against the evidence which we possess of the real performance of the Scripture miracles.

To this I answer that, certainly, I pretend not to draw any strict line which shall discriminate falsehood from truth, nor yet do I contend that the cases produced in order to contrast those cases with the Scripture miracles are beyond doubt the strongest cases possible. Still, however, we know from the principles within our reach, principles which those cases which have been produced may very sufficiently supply or illustrate, that that greater degree of evidence which we possess for the truth of the Scripture miracles could not have been acquired in behalf of a falsehood. There are many contrarieties on which

we may safely pronounce, though we cannot *define* the separation between them^a. We grant that it is impossible to state any evidence of fact, or perhaps any evidence not strictly mathematical, in which the line of exact truth can be pointed out. In a trial for murder, it is impossible to say how much evidence may be safely subtracted, leaving precisely enough to justify conviction, and leaving no more. It is by no means certain that some future murderer may not produce stronger evidence in his favour than has ever yet been found except in the case of the innocent. But this prevents us not from being able to affirm with certainty that some strong evidences are decisive of guilt. And so, if we can discriminate the Scripture miracles, as true, from every thing that may be assumed or proved to be false, there may be much intermediate, and debatable evidence with regard to other miracles, which need not come into question, unless indeed, supposing those other miracles true, there be in them something inconsistent with Scripture.

Besides this also, it ought in fairness to be observed, that it is not the business of the de-

^a Malthus on Population. Book III. Ch. I. Vol. II. p. 89. Edit. 1806.

fenders of Christianity to produce that evidence which bears most strongly against it. We produce *our* evidence, the evidence *for* Christianity. It is the business of our adversaries, if that evidence does not satisfy them, to show equal evidence of any falsehood they may select. It is not our business to seek for cases of comparison with what we affirm to be wholly incomparable.

Add to this that, with regard to most stories of miracles, and those the stories, which, next to those of the Scripture, are the best evidenced, I mean the various miracles of ecclesiastical history, it is wholly immaterial to the truth of the Scripture miracles, whether those other stories may not be true. The *form* of Paley's argument ^a, and the *title* of Douglas's, may lead some to suppose that the making an absolute discrimination between the Scripture miracles and all others, or between all true miracles and all that are false, may be a material portion of the evidence of those of the Scripture.—But this is not so. Other miracles may be true, and ours may be true also. This may be the case, unless those other miracles are inconsistent with ours. If they are false, and if they also stand on evi-

^a See note P at the end of the volume.

dence which may be brought into equal competition with ours, then, and then only, they may be alleged fairly against us. But, except in this case, we have nothing to do with them in any question concerning the Scriptural evidence, except as far as they may be accounted remarkable facts in the history of the human mind, and as such may enable us to discuss that evidence the more accurately, by giving us information of the true nature and extent of the powerful principle of human credulity.

To this it may be added, that in proving the truth of the Scripture miracles, it is not to be supposed that the marks of truth, which they exhibit, are meant to be stated as being in their whole extent altogether *necessary* parts of the proof. Some of those marks may, perhaps, be more than necessary, may be thrown in, as it were, *ex abundanti materia*. Possibly it may be thought that this remark is too obvious. Yet it may be worth making, in order to preclude an objection which may be sometimes hastily raised from the very prodigality with which the evidence of revelation is often, and most ably, offered to our view. In reading Leslie's celebrated tract against the Deists it is natural for

the reader to feel himself even oppressed by the accumulation of evidence which is there brought together, to ask himself why all this proof should be necessary, or to surmise that a religion, which requires so much proof, cannot be effectually supported by any.

But in all such surmises the true argument is mistaken. Neither from the argument itself, nor indeed from the particular argumentation of that able and excellent treatise, are we led to conclude that it would be safe to reject a revelation which had less or fewer marks of truth, than those which are there shown to be impressed on our own. Whether that be safe or not, is left a point undetermined. It does not follow, therefore, that the marks of truth there enumerated are all of them necessary to exclude the supposition, which those marks certainly do exclude peremptorily, that our religion may be the work of fraud or enthusiasm. For any thing that appears, the religion might be true, and the truth of it might be capable of satisfactory proof, even though some of those marks of truth were wanting : as in mechanics a less power might often accomplish the end which a greater may be employed to perform.

To return to our position, that in proving the truth of the Scripture miracles, it is unnecessary to draw a strict line of distinction between true and false pretensions to miracles. That this is not necessary must be plain from what has been said. Unnecessary as it is in the question of evidence, I profess also that I see no reason of importance which should make us in any way peculiarly anxious to possess this power of discriminating all such true from all such false pretensions. I see not any use which this power can serve, unless the miracle which is brought into question be produced as the sanction either of some new revelation, or of some authoritative interpretation of the old. It is not here the question whether the miracles of Scripture be the only true miracles recorded in history; it is not the question whether the power of working them be ever in these later ages granted to man. I allow to these points a certain interest and importance^a. But the question here is only whether in cases, in which no doctrine is any way affected by our decision, we may yet affirm that it would answer some end of religion to be able

^a See on these points the following chapter.

to frame a rule by which to decide, whether or no any given act be miraculous.

This question may, I think, be answered clearly in the negative. If we grant, for instance, that some miracles were true of those said to have been worked at the tomb of Polycarp, it is quite immaterial, whether or no we have means of determining whether some are not merely referable to the imagination. No religious principle is in this case concerned. And though it is sometimes held as a reason for expecting to find some exact criterion of miracles, that in a matter of such immense and incomparable importance, as the question whether God reveals himself to us, or not, we may be assured that he will enable us to discover the truth: I own I see not why we can justly expect that rather in this case than in any other he should protect our reasonings from all possible error. In a case where the miracle is not alleged to sustain any new revelation or doctrine, I do not see that it can be of any peculiar importance.

Even, also, where it is alleged for that purpose, though much caution is, no doubt, necessary that we do not conclude prematurely concerning any of the dispensations of God, yet I do not see

that an erroneous decision, on a question relating either to the doctrines or the evidences of Christianity, or indeed of any other religion, can either be more prejudicial to us, or require more particularly the protection of God, than any other error not necessarily involving a greater share of moral turpitude or obliquity. If we decide against any doctrine or any miracle, because barred either by wilfulness, or by self-deceit, from a humble and candid reception of the truth, few immoralities can be more serious than this. This is altogether that evil heart of unbelief which, as we are taught both by reason and Scripture, is one of the worst and most hateful of vices. But intellectual error, even on religious questions, is not more virulent than other errors of the intellect, which have only an equal bearing on morals, or on those practical lessons of faith and obedience, which it was our blessed Saviour's first object to enforce.

On the other hand, also, I am not sensible that any serious mischief can be expected to arise from the being led by want of an exact criterion concerning miracles, to believe some miracles to be genuine which are not so : that is, in cases where no revelation is founded on them, or

none which is inconsistent with reason or Scripture.

One reason in particular, which, if I mistake not, has great weight in inducing a disposition to discredit all miracles, those excepted which are recorded in Scripture, appears to be evidently light and unfounded. It is often remarked that, if miracles were common, their peculiarity, which consists in a deviation from the common or observable course of nature, must consequently be in the same degree undiscernible. And this remark is applied to justify the conclusion, that if frequent miracles were to be performed in all ages, we could not distinguish any ordinary course of nature, nor infer that the miracles recorded of Moses and Christ were out of that course, or vouchers of their mission.

But this conclusion is, I think, evidently invalid. If, indeed, we could discern *no* course of nature, if events of all kinds succeeded each other in such a way, that from seeing the acts of one man, we could infer nothing as to whether or no they surpassed the powers possessed by his species, in this case certainly we could know nothing of miracles, we could infer nothing from them. Still, however, if we saw the power of miracles

to be not universal, but limited to one object, confided only, we may suppose, to the teachers of Christianity, I do not see that that power of miracles could be on any account fairly regarded as indecisive, or that it would not operate most justly, and reasonably, as a standing evidence of the certain truth of the religion. It might still be employed only to promote that religion, or to reward the virtues, and confirm the faith of believers. All human affairs might still revolve, in other respects, in their usual or recognized course. If thus there were one subject, a subject involving a claim of a particular divine revelation and providence, which subject was obviously regulated on different principles from those which regulate the common affairs of the world, it appears to me clear that a complete proof of its being so regulated would prove the authority to which the revelation lays claim. If we had such a proof, we should undoubtedly value it highly. It is, indeed, much the same with that argument of Warburton, which, abstracted from the paradoxes with which it is in some measure incumbered, no one, I presume, has ever thought of contesting; that if we grant that the Jewish polity could not have sub-

sisted without a particular Providence, we infer, of course, its divine original and authority.—So also, if the power of working miracles were still conferred by our Saviour on his church, we should have an argument for Christianity of similar nature and certainty, and an argument in addition to our present evidence.

It is clear from what has been said, that to prove the truth of a miracle, it may not be necessary to examine all cases of miracles, or to be able to draw any exact line of distinction between true and false pretensions to miracles.

But though this is certain, and it must consequently be impossible to pronounce with certainty, where the miraculous may be said to end or begin, it is not the less certain that the miracles of Scripture *are* clearly discriminated from all other pretensions. Of other pretensions let us admit that some may be true: yet none of them have all those distinguishing marks by which the miracles of Scripture are impressed with a peculiar character of their own. What these marks are may be seen by retracing the former arguments, the arguments proposed concerning the nature of the facts, the early reception of them, the impartiality of the witnesses,

the fulness of their conviction, the testimony of adversaries. These marks of truth, and also the number of the miracles, the cause in which they were performed, and the effect which they produced, are marks which altogether complete a body of evidence, incomparably superior to that of any other miracles, even granting that other miracles may have been performed, in any age whatsoever.

Moreover, we may be persuaded that this distinctive character is not impressed on the Scripture miracles without some moral and providential design, but is meant to excite our attention and gratitude, to discriminate the more touchingly from all others that great cause in which the first-begotten was sent into the world. Also, though not *necessary* to prove the truth of miracles, I have shown already^a that it enhances our proof, to know that there exist not any other claims which are at all comparable to ours; that though, if the miracles of Scripture be disproved, there exists not any other revelation, which can any where be set up against the Deist, yet, though every other claim be disproved, ours still possess the strongest ground of their own.

^a See the conclusion of Chap. II. § III.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE ATTENTION DUE TO ANY OTHER CLAIMS OF MIRACLES, BESIDES THOSE WHICH WE FIND RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE.

It has been proved sufficiently in the preceding chapter that the evidence of the Scripture miracles is not affected by our inability to draw a precise line of distinction between true and false miracles. As it would be unaffected by our admission of some miracles, even though false, which have nothing in them inconsistent with the Scriptural doctrines^a, so it would be unaffected also by the rejection of others, even though true, which are not recorded in Scripture.

But though the truth of the Scripture miracles may be thus placed out of the question, yet there may be other claims which still remain undetermined. I do not suppose that *any* other claim of miracles can rival, in point of evidence, those of the Scripture: but still, because God

^a P. 291.

has proved the truth of the Scripture by miracles so considerable, both in number and weight, that no other proof of the same kind can compete with them, it does not follow that He has shortened his arm^a, that He neither has worked, nor works at present any others, or that we may not possess at least credible evidence that other miracles have really been performed. Although not necessary in proving the truth of the Gospel miracles, it is yet a highly interesting subject of inquiry, whether miracles may not be often employed by Providence in the moral government of the world ; and especially whether their sanction may not be given to some particular exposition of the Scripture doctrines, or to some one in particular out of those many societies into which the Christian church is divided. Thus, if any Protestant thinks that the pretensions perpetually set up by the Romanists to the continued existence of the power of miracles in their church, and in their church exclusively, are to be accounted worthy of serious attention, it must, I think, be his duty to look scrupulously into the evidence on which those pretensions are rested,

^a Warburton's Julian, p. 3.

as being strong evidence, if those miracles should be genuine, of *some* superiority of their church to our own. It does *not* seem to me that their possessing exclusively this power would be a decisive argument of their having any just pretension to be the only true church, or even the church most favoured by God. Miracles alone, as we know on the highest authority^a, are by no means the most excellent among the gifts of the Spirit, and cannot be in absolute strictness appealed to as an infallible sanction of truth, except under circumstances which make their cogency manifest, and in cases in which the doctrines for which they are alleged are in themselves incapable of being disproved or refuted^b. But still, under all circumstances, if the Romish church alone could be proved to be now gifted with miraculous powers, though I should hardly concede that its possession of them could imply altogether a preference of that church above all others, it yet appears to me that it might imply much which is of importance. It would imply, I think, that the members of that church are the

^a Matt. vii. 22, 23. 1 Cor. xii. 28. 31. xiii. xiv. 1. et sqq.

^b Preliminary Dissertation, § 1.

sole possessors of that *species*, or if not that species, that *degree* of true faith, which has the power, under God's blessing, of working miracles; and the necessary consequences of such a conclusion would prove to be of great practical moment.

The general question, therefore, whether any miracles have been performed, besides those of the Scripture, and the more particular one whether any have been performed, and under what circumstances, by the members of any one communion of Christians, or more than one, is a question deserving of a very serious consideration.

But can it be solved? Is it not a question too extensive to be ever examinable by any human knowledge, or exhausted in the course of the longest life? Does not all history teem with pretensions to miracles, which, as has already been seen*, are not disproved by proving the truth of those of the Scripture; or even if it were otherwise, even if every claim of miracles which we find either in profane or ecclesiastical history could be minutely examined, and declared a forgery, how could this afford us sufficient ground to infer either that God has not worked any, of

* P. 291.

which we still may be ignorant, or that none may be worked now, either in the church, or out of it ?

To this I answer that I am far from venturing to draw any such absolute or sweeping inference. As I do not venture to assign a criterion by which false and true miracles may be always discriminated, still less do I dare to affirm universally, that all claims of miracles excepting those of the Scripture, or that all claims, say for instance of the church of Rome, are absolutely and universally false and unfounded. But then this is not the question. The real question is to be narrowed very considerably within this more extensive one. The question is not whether we can put a general negative on all claims of miracles except those of the Scripture, or on any particular classes of such claims ; but whether those claims assume a shape or a seriousness which reasonably entitles them to regard and attention. Till cause be shown why any subject should be examined, we are authorized to *neglect*, even though we should be unprepared to *refute*, the particular evidence or facts alleged in it. But the principles of the attention which may be due to *all* claims of mi-

racles will be established most clearly if we state in the first place what those principles are which require our attention to those of Scripture. Of those common principles which will be acknowledged in that case, it will then be easy to see the bearing on any other.

Now the claims of the Scripture miracles to attention are briefly these: the presence and magnitude of our religion itself, and also the importance of all the doctrines it teaches. That importance, as has already been shown^a, is a material part of the cumulative evidence of the religion. But it is a part still more material of the claim it makes on us for attention, since *presumptions* of all kinds are of even greater strength in recommending any claim to consideration, than in confirming the claim after it has been considered. In estimating the strength of the claim of miracles on our consideration, the first place is, I suppose, due to the practical moment of the doctrines in proof of which those miracles are alleged. A miracle on which *no* doctrine is grounded, however strong the apparent evidence on which it rests, may not be of more importance to us than a common ghost-

^a Chap. II. § VI. pp. 207—223. and compare pp. 255—257.

story, and may safely be neglected, even though a less evidence might deserve attention in any case influencing our practical duties. But then on the other hand a great apparent strength of evidence is also of itself a material claim to attention.

But the case will be made most easy if we recal to mind the exact circumstances of some of those persons to whom Christianity was originally addressed, and of some of those also whom it addresses at present. It was addressed to the Jews. Why were they bound to attend to it? Not certainly because *all* pretensions to miracles must have of necessity some claim to consideration : but because Christ appeared as their predicted Messiah, and because they all of them both recognized an older, and were also in expectation of a new revelation. Moreover, not only did our Saviour assert the claim of miracles, and submit that claim to examination ; but also his miracles actually forced their way. They were miracles of such a character, and performed under such circumstances, that though they had been denied, they could not have been overlooked. The religion itself also was a religion eminently practical : and did actually call

men, at the time when it was promulgated, from the shadow to the substance, from the formal profession to the active exercise of sincere virtue and piety. Manifestly, therefore, it was the expectation of a Messiah, the connexion which Christianity purported to have with that religion of which the authority was recognized, the *apparent* force of the great miracles which were wrought, and the practical importance of the doctrines declared, which constituted the strength of the moral claim made on the Jews to attend to the evidence of the Christian miracles.

In setting them before the Gentiles the case was in great measure different. And every person conversant with the history of those times sees, I suppose, at once that it was so. There is not any one, who, when he reads St. Paul's eloquent complaint that "Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness,"^a does not here feel that this error of the Greeks must have been far more pardonable than that of the Jews. And for this plain reason, that the real claim of Christianity could not ordinarily be exhibited to the Greeks as possessing a degree of strength and importance

^a 1 Cor. i. 23.

equal to that which it must have assumed in the eye of the Jew. One of the cases in which it was exhibited to them most forcibly was in the memorable instance of St. Paul's preaching at Athens^a. We have reason to believe that the circumstances under which he there preached were such as to challenge just attention. But if we might imagine that his sceptical auditors could have fairly supposed that he was preaching nothing more than the existence of some new goddess called Anastasis, we might well excuse them for contemning this new superstition, or refusing to enter into any consideration of it. Myriads of deities had been introduced into Greece, each of them vouched by its own host of prodigies. Myriads of these they *knew* to be delusions; and that they should single out one for particular examination, and that one coming to them from the mouth of a Jew, could scarcely be expected under common circumstances. At all events it is certain that St. Paul's claim in this case was far inferior to the claim he made on the Jews, or on any of those Magians or other Orientalists, who had been led to believe or to regard the tradition that some great

^a Acts xvii. 15. et seq.

person should arise at this time in Judea. We find accordingly that the first preaching of Christianity both by our blessed Saviour, and his immediate disciples, was addressed almost wholly to Jews ; that when first preached in Gentile countries, it was preached to the Jews who were dispersed in those countries ; and that it does not seem to have been systematically addressed to Greeks or Gentiles, till it had acquired an independent existence, till from the magnitude of the space it occupied in the world, no less than from its divine and practical excellence, it could at once fill the eye, and also approve itself to the understanding.

The very same principles also apply to our own times with no less strength than to those of primitive Christianity. One great reason why a modern sceptic is bound to attend to our claim of miracles is, that the religion for which we claim them is always before him, that it is a religion of which all history is full, and which alone, either on account of its excellence, or on account of the strength of the apparent evidence which supports it, or on account of the talents and sincerity of its believers, can justly be entitled, at least in Christian countries, to the

slightest portion of attention or regard. Whether the religion itself be false or true, these at least constitute moral claims to attention which it were dishonest to evade or deny.

Or to turn from our own to distant regions. Where lies the reason that we expect justly from the Mahometan that he should weigh carefully the claim made on him by Christianity? Is it not that the Mahometan himself recognizes the mission of Christ, and cannot be ignorant that for many centuries Christianity has been the most powerful rival of his own religion? So also as to the Hindoo. At least one claim on him for Christianity is, that he sees it to be the professed religion of that power which is now predominant throughout the Eastern world. In short, all circumstances, whether fortuitous or otherwise, which actually attract, or ought to attract attention, either to the religion itself, or to its particular evidences, are what constitute that claim to consideration which we perceive to subsist in the Christian miracles. This also is the principle on which the apostles have argued, on which they addressed themselves to the Jews primarily^a, on which they appealed to

^a Matt. x. 5, 6. Acts, iii. 25, 26. xiii. 46. Rom. i. 16. &c.

the notoriety, at least among Jews, of our Saviour's miraculous history^a, on which they urged on the Gentiles the great necessity of a revelation, that they might so bespeak their willing attention to that Gospel which they brought forward in order to fill up that necessity^b. All these particulars of what the apostles did and said will be easily understood to resolve themselves into the presence or magnitude, and into the importance or goodness, of that cause or doctrine for which the miracles are alleged. Whether or no the miracles were really performed may perhaps be another question: but these are the principles which make it the duty of every man to whom the Gospel is adequately proposed, to open his eyes and ears to the alleged evidences of its truth, to put forth his hand and take of that tree which purports to be the tree of life, and so to eat, and live for ever^c.

Such appear to be the principles which bind on all Christians, or on all to whom Christianity is adequately proposed, the duty of attending

^a Acts ii. 22. iii. 14. iv. 10. x. 37.

^b See almost the whole of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans.

^c Gen. iii. 22.

to the claim which it makes. It is easy to see also that in all analogous cases the same principles operate ; or that, if the same claims can be in other cases made out, the same attention must evidently be due. It is equally plain that the apparent absence of these claims, the absence either of all, or any of them, lessens proportionably the claim to attention, though in what proportion can only be accurately determined by a particular examination of the circumstances of each case. Thus a religion may be established, and yet be so clearly absurd that we may excuse a philosopher from giving any thought to the evidence of it. There may be very strong testimony to the truth of a miracle, and yet the occasion may be so trifling, or the scene so remote, that we may feel uninterested in it ; or it may only rouse our curiosity, or even our contempt for vulgar weakness and credulity. It may even happen on the other hand that a cause shall seem good, shall even be important, and in itself unimpeachable, and yet the miracles which it alleges in proof of its truth shall be so weakly evidenced that both the cause and the miracles may justly be regarded as unworthy of notice. Thus in the case

of Xavier. We can scarcely affirm any principle on which, *a priori*, we could refuse to listen to all testimony for those miracles which have been so often said to have prospered the labours of this pious missionary. But the testimony adduced is at the best so faint and precarious that, however predisposed we might be to admit them to proof, it were almost irrational to account their reality proved.

Hence it follows that all pretensions to miracles not recommended by such presumptions as have been enumerated may be altogether neglected by us as unworthy of notice. We may also argue further, that they can be unworthy of notice only inasmuch as we may be entitled to presume, though we may not actually have proved their *falsehood*. There can exist no miracles having a just *title* to credit, which we can be authorized to neglect or condemn. And this last inference appears to me the more valuable, because it shows to us that, if properly limited, a considerable use may be made of that very principle which Hume has undoubtedly pursued into false and sophistical consequences. Hume's principle is, that because we experience so many false pretensions to miracles, we have a right to

reject absolutely all pretensions. His principle is really nothing better than this, and includes the error of drawing a universal conclusion from only a partial induction or premisses ; of arguing that, because the many are false, none can be true, even though wrought in very extraordinary circumstances and supported by equally extraordinary evidence. There would be no error in arguing that, because we *ordinarily* experience many false claims of miracles, we have therefore so very strong a presumption against all *ordinary* claims of the kind, that we may in *ordinary* circumstances *presume* their falsity. This is a principle which is true in all art, true in all philosophy. An astronomer is informed that some unprecedented phænomena are at this moment observable among the heavenly bodies. Surely he can have no attachment to, or no zeal for his science if he does not hasten to examine or verify them. But if he knows his informant to be a very ignorant person and easily to be deceived by common appearances, he may not think the information worthy of notice. So also it may be just and wise to neglect altogether a book purporting to contain a detail of experiments, if we merely

find the book lying at random, or unless its reputation, or the known character of the author, invite us to read it. And we may, also, no less wisely and justly reject it, whatever reputation it may have in fact acquired, if we find that, in a sufficient number of instances, the experiments which it details cannot be verified.

In religion this same principle is equally true; and we must hold accordingly that since we have notoriously an extensive experience of false pretensions to miracles, we are reasonably entitled to reject all pretensions not exempted from the analogy of the rest, either by their being worked for ends more important, or by the attestation of stronger evidence, or by both these claims together. And it appears to me that these claims must be shown, as they were shown at the first origin of Christianity, and are shown by us still in all our controversies with infidels; that they must be brought home so as to challenge the attention of an honest and considerate mind, before there be a reasonable title to ask it.

That this modified use may be made of Hume's otherwise most sophistical argument, is, I think, in many respects, very satisfactory. For though his error has been often clearly refuted, it is

yet made more visible by tracing out particularly that link by which it is connected with truth. Let me here add, also, that since we can get rid in this manner of the mass of ordinary pretensions to miracles, it may be seen to answer very wise ends of Providence, that this great mass should yet be suffered to exist. It proves the extent of vulgar credulity, and calls on us to look out for at least adequate cautions against the being imposed on in any case whatsoever. It serves to shew that the Scripture miracles do not so differ from claims often subjected, and in all ages, to human examination, that we may doubt of the principles on which we are cognizant of them, but that they are of a nature concerning which, "by reason of use"^a, our faculties are well exercised to judge.

On the application of these principles to particular cases, it is not my purpose here to enlarge. The duty of attending to any one case, or class of cases, is evidently a duty which must always be relative to the circumstances of the individual before whom it is brought, to his means of information, to his skill in controversy,

^a Heb. v. 14.

and even to his previous habits of belief. There are doubtless some cases which speak plainly enough. Thus many of the miracles related by Herodotus, the modern miracles of Siam or Nigritia, those relics of Pagan divination or sorcery by which the vulgar, even in our own country, still continue to be disgraced, are some of them so trifling, and have all of them so much the aspect of fable, that surely no rational or well educated man can ever be expected to pay the slightest attention to, nor think of entering into the specific examination of any of them. And some cases of this sort are, I suppose, so very clear, that we may pronounce, concerning them, with the very same degree of assurance with which we can pronounce even of the most direct inconsistencies with the evident and recognized doctrines of Scripture^a.

The cases of most difficulty are those cases which arise in the bosom of Christianity itself. And here more especially, both the duty of inquiring, and also the presumptions on which we have to decide, are like all other duties strictly relative to the particular circumstances of the

^a See Preliminary Dissertation, § 11.

individual concerned. The Romanist, for example, might scarcely be justified if he were to abandon without sifting the evidence narrowly, a claim pressed on him by that article of his creed, which compels him to hold that the power of miracles is still retained, and still exercised, in his church. A Protestant, on the other hand, if he be sufficiently satisfied of the cessation of miracles from the apostolical age, or from the age of Constantine, must necessarily have much less, if any, ground for regarding the evidence of recent, or of any modern, miracles; unless, indeed, circumstances may make it expedient to enter even into the evidence of what may seem to him mere fables, for the purpose of checking vulgar delusion. It is equally certain also, that if he be satisfied on any other adequate grounds, that the cause in which any miracle is alleged, is a cause either inconsistent with certain truth, or even against the truth of which there exist sufficient presumptions; he has likewise the privilege of deciding summarily against the claim. In the exercise of this privilege he is, indeed, still bound to presume, not perhaps an unprejudiced, for there may be some prejudices too reasonable to be abandoned,

but yet an honest and a candid mind; and if it should happen that the strength of the evidence should, notwithstanding the apparent improbability of the miracle, make on him a strong and unexpected impression, it may become him to examine whether his prejudice is well founded; or whether that wisdom, which to us must always be incomprehensible, the ways of which are not as our ways, nor the thoughts as our thoughts, may not be calling on him to retrace the foundations on which his habitual convictions are built up, and to examine whether they rest on the true rock of salvation, and not on human pride or fallacy. This wholesome caution, while it guards us from the abuse, interferes not in the least with the just use of that reason, which is one of the most glorious gifts of God, and the humblest and most indispensable servant of faith; and which we *must* use in the way which has been here proposed, if we would have any protection at all against that crowd of ordinary pretensions to miracles, on which it is usual to see *some* check imposed even in the most credulous of Christian communities.

But it may still be said that if a miracle be

rejected without specific and particular examination, and only because it appears trifling or improbable, it may happen that the truth shall be so rejected. Trifling and important are merely relative words. May not that which to one person may justly *appear* trifling, not only appear, but really *be* to another person a matter of importance, and deserving attention?

No doubt this is so. Nothing, as I apprehend, can be more certain than that education or language, research or reasoning, time or chance, may really make those matters important to one person, which may be to other persons wholly unworthy of notice; and though, if equally offered, a true religion be doubtless equally the concern of all men, yet, if offered unequally, its claim on different men will yet be wholly different. Even though a true miracle, therefore, if proposed imperfectly, or proposed under very unfavourable circumstances, *may* on these principles happen to be rejected, yet, according to a just estimate, it is not the truth which can, under such circumstances, be properly said to be rejected, but only so very erroneous or very imperfect a view of it, that what is rejected is in

fair construction to be accounted not truth, but error.

Thus it is in science. That system of the universe which was taught by Pythagoras five hundred years before Christ was, in its main feature, the true system which has been since demonstrated. But, as taught by him, serious doubts must have been attached to it, and a person who may have been led by those doubts then to reject it, may have been faultless, is certainly not taxable with the same fault, with which he would have been taxable if he had rejected Newton's demonstrations. This is of course conceded; and this concession contains every thing which is necessary to prove the correctness of what has been said. He who rejects the Pythagorean system of the universe is taxable with error, only in the exact proportion of the clearness of the evidence brought before him, or of the evidence at which it is in his power to arrive. This may be so slight as to be unworthy of notice. It is defective evidence, not truth, which is presented to him.

In the same manner of Christianity or of the Christian miracles. Let us place before us one

of the Deists of Hindostan who may have lived in the age before the voyages of the Portuguese. How great soever the real claims of the gospel, *he* may not have had any reason to think that it possessed any which could be worthy of notice. His real duty was to act for himself on the best knowledge of which he might be possessed. If nothing had reached him concerning the Christian religion, except that it was the creed of Europe, or perhaps of Ethiopia: if there were no secret vice of the understanding, no immoral prejudice of the affections, which operated to form in any way his determination, he decided indeed falsely, but still he might not judge unreasonably, in making the decision that it was not worthy his notice. For what, in truth, he decided against was not Christianity, but only some rumour concerning some remote superstition, which, till better instructed (and for that better instruction he might not have time, or means, or motive to look), he could hardly help confounding with the descents of Brahma, or the incarnations of Vishnoo. There cannot indeed be any question in which we must not be guided by the same rules. In every question, and more especially in such as are practical, it

is of necessity the *apparent*, not the real importance, on which its claim on us for consideration depends. The statesman refuses even to listen to rumours which come not in a *shape* that seems to demand his attention. The lawyer either knows, or ought to know, that he loses his labour by employing too much ingenuity on those many subtleties and refinements of evidence, which may always be raised even on the clearest questions, to the neglect of the more common and powerful principles which sway ordinarily the judgments of mankind. It matters not in the least that there may remain some possibility that the feeblest rumour may turn out to be true, and that human opinions may take such a bias that doubts and refinements, which are deemed at one time insignificant, may be thought at another to possess strong claims to attention.

Is not this assuredly also that view of the case, which is especially applicable to every case of religion? It is the very nature of religion to go on plain principles. To these at all events we must address its *popular* evidences. To tell a plain man, who is seeking to know his duty, that his previous knowledge, either from rea-

soning or from authority, of what *seems* to him true or important, or to have, in short, any claim upon his attention, can be of no use or moment in guiding his search, is nothing but a sophism, which will be always lost on him who is feeling after the truth of a divine revelation, who is led by his own wants and his own sense of them, to seek out the fountain at which salvation originates, the true forgiver and redeemer of his sins.

Nothing that can reasonably be esteemed trifling, nothing at least that is not brought forcibly home to him by some claim moral or intellectual, can have any just hold on the man engaged in this pilgrimage, nothing which he has a right to deem fabulous or superstitious, or opposed to doctrines which he knows to be divine. All claims of miracles which have such presumptions against them, it is, undoubtedly, either his duty to reject, or his privilege to forbear attending to.

But in the same degree in which he is authorized to neglect other claims, it is his duty to attend to those of the Gospel. All the principles which prove others to be trifling, show the supreme importance of these. If, to the Athenians

St. Paul seemed a babbler, or to be a setter forth of strange gods^a, if he seemed to Felix only a Jewish controversialist^b, yet none can now be ignorant that we at least claim the religion which he taught, as the work of the God of heaven and earth, as a religion analogous to all that we know of nature, expressive and illustrative of the divine goodness and justice, and inculcating in the purest and most affectionate manner, and with the weightiest sanctions ever proposed, the most perfect code of virtue. None can now be ignorant that this religion is believed by, at least, a very large portion of the most enlightened lovers of truth; that, if it be not true, we have no resource anywhere from all the anxieties and fears of scepticism, no rest anywhere for the sole of the foot, nothing but an ocean of perturbed waters before us, and no ark of refuge.

There can be none surely who doubts that we owe most serious attention to a religion which comes to us under such circumstances, and to the miracles which evidence such a religion. If, in the miracles of heathenism, and in all

^a Acts, xvii. 18.

^b Acts, xxiii. 29.

modern miracles the case is different, if we see not in those miracles any end worth the means, if in the means themselves we see evident superstition, yet this points out to us with the more emphasis the greatness of the end proposed in the gospel, and also the excellence of those practical lessons which are to be derived from the consideration of the gospel miracles themselves. For I may here add finally that the *moral character* of those miracles, the illustrations which they furnish of God's mercy, and of his care while rescuing from temporal evil, to point out the way of spiritual good, are not only subjects of devout study and meditation, but when fully understood and appreciated, are a new and considerable argument of their truth.

But I leave it to others to draw those practical inferences which this nature of the gospel miracles supplies; subjoining only that, if, in drawing those inferences, we encounter more difficulty than in proving the truth of the facts from which those inferences purport to be derived, this is to be expected from the very nature of the case. The evidence of the facts has lost nothing from time^a, nothing from the bre-

^a See Ch. II. Sect. v.

vity with which they are in general related^a, nothing from the slight discrepancies between the relaters^b. This evidence is, and will be to all generations, the plainest and most popular of all proofs of our religion. But on the other hand, it is certain that much of the moral import of each particular miracle (that of the resurrection perhaps alone excepted), was exhausted on the objects of each particular case, and neither is, nor could be, perpetuated. In studying that import, our comparative ignorance of the whole state of the case may be the occasion of difficulties not now to be obviated.

But our ignorance though partial is not entire. Some conclusions there are which we are still entitled to draw from the moral character not less than from the power clearly discernible in the Scripture miracles; and I know of no subject which would better repay the investigation of a mind prepared both by reason and piety for the execution of a task which, though easy in some parts, touches in other parts on extremely difficult questions, than the task of tracing these conclusions. Every thing so traced

^a See Ch. II. Sect. III.

^b See Paley's Evidences, Part III. Ch. I.

would add some new confirmation to all the other evidence which has been alleged in this treatise for the certain truth of the actual miracles. And if this be not, as surely it is not, wanted for the purpose of giving us a still additional *proof*, we may yet humbly believe it to be God's gracious intention that, as far as man can legitimately follow his operations, no void whatever shall be left unfilled, no portion unsymmetrical, in the evidence of the most valuable of all his gifts, the pure religion which we have received at his hands.

NOTES.

NOTE A, PAGE 16.

From what has been said, it will be seen that, in most respects, I agree with the statement of a very respectable writer, that, "the contrariety of the event to those laws by which [according to our human observation] this world is governed in the course of God's general providence, is that alone which constitutes it a proper miracle."^a But as nothing contrary to those laws can be effected by anything less than a superhuman power, I hold myself authorized, for the reason given in the text^b, to make the *author* of the effect, instead of the effect itself the subject matter of the definition, and consequently, to state a miracle to be *an act above human power*, which is the definition given by some of our ablest writers. Yet it may be proper here to take some notice of the objections which Farmer, in particular, has made to this definition.

The first of these objections with which I need to concern myself, is the observation, "Nor does the calling a miracle an *effect above human power*, distinguish it from all other effects equally above human power produced by superior beings when acting *within their usual sphere*,

^a Farmer on Miracles, p. 10, 12mo. 1805.

^b Page 2, and note ^a, *ibid.*

which, for that reason cannot be miraculous."^a But why not miraculous? Our definition of miracles is not intended to distinguish the *spheres* of a class of beings whose powers and operations must necessarily be to us unknown and illimitable. And with regard to the *authority* which those beings possess, what difference can it make to us, whether they are acting in their own spheres or out of them? Which of these is the true case we can neither know nor conjecture, unless indeed Revelation steps in to inform us. Nor is there, in either case, any difference with regard to us, or with regard to the reliance which we should reasonably place on their authority.

The second objection^b is, that true miracles may be excluded by the definition that miracles must be events *above* human power: and for this reason, that powers which belong not to man may yet belong to beings who, though they exert powers which *differ* from, may not exert any which are *superior* to his, and yet may exert powers which may be justly accounted miraculous. A third objection which may be found in the place I refer to, I am willing to omit out of my sincere respect for a writer, who, on a little consideration, could not but have seen its irrelevancy. It is enough to observe that, as a miracle must be appealed to, if used as evidence of any doctrine delivered^c, so beings incapable of making such an appeal cannot, for that reason, be the authors of miracles, that is, of miracles which can be made use of as evidence: and also that, if any being other than man,

^a Farmer, in a note, l. c.

^b Ibid.

^c See p. 5.

the sole rational agent within our cognizance, is seen under any circumstances to make that appeal, this *other than* human must, for all purposes of the argument, be accounted a *superhuman* authority. The only reason why we contend that a miracle must be an event above, or beyond, the power of man, is, that this is a condition necessary to exclude that stream of error which we know is to be found in all human authority. Exclude this, and it is the merest logomachy to say that, though we may find another which *differs* from it, yet that other may not be in all things *superior*. If it gives an attestation which man cannot give, this only is the *superiority* which we require.

It is sufficiently plain then, that for the purposes of this treatise we may define a miracle, as being an act above human power, or as an event out of, or contrary to, that course of nature, which comes under human cognizance^a. Of the various acts which may come under this definition, I farther restrict myself, after the example of other writers, to events out of, or contrary to, those *physical* laws of nature which we observe. I *refer* sometimes to the internal evidence, but not without speaking of it as the *internal* distinctly.

But it is necessary to observe, that there may be other miracles besides these.

I. The internal evidence is a great and proper miracle. The very essence of it is that on the face of the religion are impressed marks which, under all circumstances, man

^a See pp. 1, 2.

could not have invented. But this miracle not resting on *testimony*, or at least, not in the sense in which the other miracles rest on it, is usually regarded as a subject which properly constitutes a separate field of inquiry.

II. Predictions of the future, such as man could not predict, must, in like manner, be necessarily accounted miraculous; and these predictions also naturally occupy a wide field of their own. Both these cases, though they may be properly referred for these reasons to separate works on the internal evidence, and on the prophecies, are yet in their nature strictly miraculous.

It is farther to be remarked also, that, independently of miracles, or at least of all miracles except that which constitutes the original revelation itself, and which, of course, cannot be alleged as its own evidence, there may, and in fact does, exist a *moral* proof of the divine authority of our religion, which is related very nearly to the miraculous. Though neither our Saviour nor his disciples had wrought miracles, yet, if they had still asserted a divine commission, though a commission vouched only *to themselves* by acts which *they* could not possibly mistake; if, in pursuance of that assertion they had taught a pure system of morals, even though a system not beyond human invention; and had lived and died, as they did actually live and die, in testimony of the truth of the assertion they made; might we not affirm it to be altogether incredible that any *false* teachers could have been *able* to exhibit all those decisive marks of sincerity?

Or, to be more particular, let us attribute to Christ,

as to a man of a master spirit, soaring eminently above all his contemporaries, the whole conception of the Evangelical system. Yet this very character of Christ himself is, I think, no mean security to us that he would not falsely have assumed a divine commission to teach doctrines of which it is a fundamental principle that the truth and simplicity of the moral character is an essential constituent of all real virtue in man. Unprincipled teachers may teach, I doubt not, true doctrines: may teach, and even for purposes of deceit, this very doctrine of truth and simplicity: but that any man who taught this doctrine as our Saviour did, should, with no turn to serve, and even at the sacrifice of his life, have assumed at the same time a false authority, is a supposition so wild that the least knowledge of human nature may assuredly enable us to deny the reasonableness of it. It may be no less inconsistent with the moral laws of our nature that a man placed in any particular circumstances should *will* to claim falsely a divine authority, than that, in the same circumstances, he should be *able* to invent those doctrines which he teaches as divine.

It has been sometimes said, that to suppose a moral teacher like Christ falsely to have claimed a divine commission, would be to suppose a greater *miracle* than any of those which his holy religion calls on us to believe; and that it would be more *miraculous* that the human testimony to the gospel history should be false, than that the actual miracles recorded in it should be true. I would here observe, that though such sayings may be to-

lerated, as a pointed though lax manner of speaking, yet, if we use the word *miraculous* in the sense of *improbable*, they may easily betray us into verbal fallacies, of which even Paley has not kept perfectly clear. "Mr. Hume", he says, "states the case of miracles to be a contest of opposite improbabilities, that is to say, a question whether it be more improbable that the miracle should be true, or the testimony false : and this I think a fair account of the controversy."^a

Now here, I think, it should have been remarked, that these improbabilities are not only, as Paley has in this place shewn with his usual convincing brevity, very different in *degree*, but also that they are improbabilities of very different *kinds* ; so different, indeed, that I should scarcely have thought myself authorized to use the same word in speaking of both. Though miracles may be improbable when taken in the gross, and before we enter into any consideration of "the existence, power, and disposition of the Deity, his concern in the creation, the end answered by the miracle, the importance of that end, and its subserviency to the plan pursued in the work of nature,"^b yet take in these circumstances, and there may remain no improbability, not even the slenderest presumption against them. The improbability, therefore, may exist in our ignorance only, and may disappear entirely when that is cleared up.

^a Evidences—Preparatory Considerations, Vol. I. p. 11.

^b Ibid, p. 12.

But the improbability of the falsehood of human testimony, under the circumstances in which we allege it for the Scripture miracles, is doubtless an improbability of a very different kind. The greater portion of the mass of testimony to miracles, taking in all miracles which have been in all ages pretended, may be altogether unworthy of serious attention^a: and hence, *in the gross*, there may be some presumption against it. But still there is nothing to preclude some parts of that mass from a capacity of being substantiated by the most absolute proof: and in this case, which we contend to be the case of the Scripture miracles, the improbability, as it is here expressed, of the falsehood of the human testimony on which they rest, *may be* converted into a decisive certainty of its truth; *is*, as we contend, so converted on examination.

Thus, though in our inquiries into the truth of the miracles, we may, perhaps, set out with some general notion, that the truth of the miracles, and the falsehood of the testimony, are opposite improbabilities which we have to compare; yet inquiry and analysis may prove this notion erroneous: we may find that the miracle is not improbable: we may find that the testimony is absolutely certain. Thus entirely may this whole contrast fade away by being made subject to examination or argument.

^a See Chap. VI.

NOTE B, PAGE 27.

The common interpretation of Matt. xii. 24., &c. and of other parallel passages, is, that the Jews attributed to the assistance of demons the performance of our Saviour's miracles *in general*. It has been ably contended (Farmer, on Miracles, p. 248, &c.) that this was not the case; that the casting out of devils was the only miracle which they ever ascribed to demoniacal agency; that even while they refused to our Saviour that credit to which his miracles justly entitled him, yet still they did not deny that his *other* miracles were unequivocal indications of the divine power (Farmer, p. 250). And it is farther contended, also, that our Saviour's argument does not extend, as has commonly been supposed, to authorize us any way to try the miracle by the doctrine, but is limited to the mere absurdity of supposing that Satan will act in opposition to himself.

On this I have to observe, that the only point of importance to any part of the argument of this treatise, is merely to prove the fact, that, from some cause or other, our Saviour's miracles were not accounted among the Jews altogether conclusive of the divine authority claimed by him. That they were not so accounted is sufficiently evident from John, ix. 24: "Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner."

If then thus they did not account miracles to be in themselves wholly conclusive, they must necessarily have

tried them by *some* other criterion. What that may have been is not material to the present purpose. The fact is, that what they did try them by was their own interpretation of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and that completion of those prophecies which they expected from the Messiah.

With regard to the opinion that the ejection of demons was the only miracle which the enemies of our Saviour ascribed to the assistance of Beelzebub, it is hard to believe that, if they resorted to this evasion for the sake of getting rid of one class of his miracles, they should not resort to it also to get rid of the rest. The ejection of demons was manifestly accounted fully *as great* a miracle as any other of those performed by our Saviour. It is usually spoken of with even a peculiar emphasis, and is, I think, particularly identified as a miracle of the same class with the others in Mark, ix. 38, 39. I do not mean to say, that in this matter the opinions of the Jews were well defined or consistent: but, determined as they were to deny at all events our Saviour's authority, they could scarcely have invented any better subterfuge. We have reason to think that, in the age of our Saviour, all sorts of miracles, indiscriminately, were without scruple referred by many persons to the power of *magic*: and it is not likely that the power of the "Prince of the devils" should have been thought more limited than that of magical art.

With regard to the affirmation that our Saviour's argument does not extend to make the doctrine revealed

anything of a test of the divine authority of the miracle, to me it appears that it does go this length. The argument is, that it is absurd to suppose that Satan should be divided against himself, or against beings supposed to be serving his cause. That he should act in division against himself, and that he should act in promotion of a pure and holy doctrine, appear to me one and the same absurdity. *If*, therefore, we prove the purity and holiness, or, in other words, if we prove the *goodness* of the doctrine, we have the same argument, that it cannot come from Satan, which we have, that he cannot be divided against himself. The test in the one case is, that we *suppose* the demon ejected to be a portion or subject of the evil being himself. The test in the other case is, that we *prove* of the doctrine that it is a doctrine which that being would not have taught.

That the *goodness* of the doctrine may be a clear proof that it does not come from the moral enemy of mankind is another form, therefore, of our Saviour's argument. But this is, undoubtedly, to make the *credibility* of the doctrine an element of the reliance which may be placed on miracles. If we remove the objection that they may come from the devil, by proving that the doctrine is not evil but good; we insert the condition that it shall not be an evil, or, in other words, that it shall be a credible doctrine, as a condition of its admissibility as coming from God.

NOTE C, PAGES 36 AND 44.

Compare Matt. vii. 22, xxiv. 24. Mark ix. 38. 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. 2 Thes. ii. 9, 11. Rev. xiii. 13, 14. It does not seem to me that there is sufficient proof in these passages, or in any others which I can recollect in the New Testament, that real miracles may ever be pleaded in behalf of any erroneous doctrine. In Mark ix. 38, where an unauthorized teacher is said to have been seen by the disciples casting out devils in our Saviour's name, it is entirely evident (v. 39) that he grounded not any false doctrine on this miracle. Neither, perhaps, is it quite certain that there was here any miracle. The disciples may have spoken of the mere form of exorcism (compare Matt. xii. 27), without meaning to affirm anything as to the effect: and if they so spoke, this teacher may have been powerless, as were the sons of Sceva the Jew, mentioned in Acts xix. 14—16.

Also, if demons could be cast out by ordinary exorcisms (Matt. xii. 27), which I do not think, however, to be affirmed anywhere in Scripture, such an ejection of them is not to be entitled a miracle. Farther also, if it be the just interpretation of Scripture, or if we suppose it to be a fact which may be proved by any other than Scriptural evidence, that *real* miracles have been ever *ostensibly* performed by false or unauthorized teachers, it may still be possible that those miracles may have been wrought, not by those teachers, or by evil spirits at their instance, but expressly by God, in order to *refute* their pretensions.

The witch of Endor was evidently surprised and confounded by the appearance of Samuel even on her own evocation. That this was a *divine* miracle, or not the work of an evil spirit, Farmer (Chap. iv. § 2.), has, I think, proved decisively; and it is far from easy to assign the utmost limits to which the principle of this case may be carried.

NOTE D, PAGE 63.

There are only three miracles in which we read of any process whatever. See Mark vii. 32—37. viii. 23—26, and the case mentioned in the text, of the man who had been born blind, John ix. 1—7. It is supposed by Dr. Graves^a, and is transferred from his Essay into Mr. Horne's most useful compendium on the critical study and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, that in these three “only instances where a *deliberate external* application is related to have been used, the reason for using it seems to have been *one and the same, namely, to convey to the individuals on whom the miracles were performed, a clear assurance that Jesus was the person, at whose command, and by whose agency the cure was wrought, and to enable them to state to others the grounds of this assurance fully and circumstantially.*

Dr. Graves's reasons for forming this conclusion are

^a Essay on the character of the Apostles and Evangelists, designed to prove that they were not enthusiasts, pp. 287, 288.

detailed in that chapter of Mr. Horne's book which treats of the miracles related in Scripture. (Vol. I. pp. 271, 272.) It appears to me, however, that a much better reason has been assigned by Lightfoot, and illustrated by him from the Talmudists. See the *Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ* on John ix. 6, where it is proved that spittle (fasting-spittle) was, by the Jews, accounted a remedy for disorders of the eyes^a; but that it was forbidden to use it for this purpose on the Sabbath-day. Now this blind man, we know, was healed on the Sabbath. "So that", says Lightfoot, "in this action of our Saviour's we may observe that he does not heal this sick man with a word, as he did others, but chooseth to do that which was against their (the Jews') canonical observation of the Sabbath": which is quite analogous to the recognized principles of our Saviour's conduct in other instances.

It is very remarkable that in all these three cases, the only cases recorded in which any process was employed, the use of *spittle* is one of the circumstances. If we may conjecture that the cases recorded by St. Mark, as well as that here before us from St. John, were cases of miracles performed on the Sabbath-day, Lightfoot's conclusion must be quite irresistible.

^a To Lightfoot's citations it may be worth while to add the following short extract, from the story recorded by Tacitus, of the miracle attributed to Vespasian at *Alexandria*. "Ex plebe Alexandrina quidam oculorum tabe notus genua ejus advolvitur, remedium cæcitatatis exposcens gemitu, * * * precabaturque principem ut genas et oculorum orbes dignaretur respergere oris excremento." *Hist.* iv. 81.

NOTE E, PAGE 89.

“Fumi vero et ignis usus exercitibus iter per solitudines facturis in regionibus orientalibus antiquus et pervulgatus fuit. Id de Persis narrat Curtius iii. 3. ‘Patrio more Persarum traditum est, orto sole demum procedere. Die jam inlustri, signum e tabernaculo regis buccina dabatur. Super tabernaculum, unde ab omnibus conspici posset, imago Solis chrystallo inclusa fulgebat. Ordo autem agminis fuit talis. Ignis, quem ipsi sacrum et æternum vocabant, argenteis altaribus præferebatur.’ Cf. Herodot. vii. 40. Xenoph. Cyrop. viii. Idem ille Curtius de Alexandro, lib. v. c. 2.: ‘Tuba, quum castra movere vellet, signum dabat; cujus sonitus, plerumque tumultuantium fremitu exoriente, haud satis exaudiebatur. Ergo per ticam, quæ undique conspici posset, supra prætorium statuit, ex qua signum eminebat pariter omnibus conspicuum. Observabatur ignis noctu, fumus interdiu.’ Vegetius de Re Militari, lib. iii. c. 5.: ‘Hostium adventum per noctem flamma, per diem fumus significat sociis.’ Frontinus Strategemat. lib. ii. c. 25.: ‘Arabes, quum esset nota consuetudo eorum, qua de adventu hostium interdiu fumo, noctu igne significare instituerant.’ Similem fumi et ignis usum etiamnum in orientalium peregrinationibus observat Harmar (Observations, ch. iv. obs. xxx. and xxxiii. Vol. ii. pp. 272. 278, et seq. of the English Transl. ed. 1808). Quæ cum ita sint, non defuerunt, qui putarent nube illa quæ Israelitis viam monstrasse traditur, simile quiddam innui. Herm. von der Hardt (in Ephe-

merid. Phil. Disc. 6, p. 86. Epistol. annex. p. 210. Ephemerid. Phil. Illustr. p. 93), existimavit columnam ignis fuisse ignem sacrum in ara accensum, columnam nubis autem fumum inde exhalantem. Tolandus vero (in Tetradymi Dissert. l. Hodegus Inscripta) contendit, intelligendum esse ignem, similem ei, quem supra descripsimus, ab Chobabo Mosis affine, et ab ipso invitato, ut viam itineris monstraret (Num. x. 29) ante Israelitarum castra praelatum." *Rosenmuller* in Exod. xiii. 21.

That the account given by Moses of the pillar which guided the Israelites cannot be explained by supposing him merely to have adopted some such practice as is described in these citations, though a practice which, even in the earliest ages, may not improbably have been in use in Arabia, is very sufficiently, I believe, proved in the text. Though the Persians, in their marches, carried an altar before them, on which an ordinary fire was kindled, the fire and cloud which are recorded in Scripture cannot be the less regarded as miraculous.

Yet the passages here cited appear to me valuable as illustrating and explaining very significantly the import and intention of this remarkable miracle. If, in the age of Moses, armies, marching through the Wilderness, were in the practice of carrying an *ordinary* fire before them, there seems the more propriety, if I may venture so to express myself, in this guidance of the Israelites by a *miraculous* fire. And that there may have existed some such *type* of this miracle is the more probable, because it is agreed among the learned that a pointed reference to

the existing customs of Egypt is to be traced in many of the institutions of the Mosaic law. On the *nature* of that reference long controversies have arisen, or on the question whether the rites and ceremonies, appointed by Moses, were appointed in imitation of, or in opposition to, those of Egypt? A clear opposition to them was, I think, doubtless intended. But still opposition requires naturally the use of nearly the same mediums of proof, or of illustration (as, for instance, of emblem set in opposition to emblem, or of ceremony set in opposition to ceremony), which the most studied imitation could exact or require. The assertion is opposite, but the language used is the same^a. This principle may, I believe, guide us with safety through all the learning which has been accumulated on the subject by Spencer and Witsius, and other eminent writers^b.

But, however this may be, I presume that no one has any doubt but that there was at least much *reference* in the institutions of Moses to the previous customs and institutions, which, whatever may have been their remoter origin, were established in his time among the Egyptians.

If, then, this chosen servant of God, in the permanent institutions which he prescribed for the Jews, used rites and ceremonies of the same kind, used the same language and the same methods of instruction, which the Jews had been habituated to in the known practice of Egypt; it is

^a Maimonides *More Nev. Pars iii.* pp. 507, 508. Buxtorf. *Basil.* 4to. 1629.

^b See Warburton's *Divine Legation*, Book iv. Ch. vi.

wholly analogous that in God's conduct of the Israelites through their many wanderings before they arrived at the promised land, he should proclaim his guidance in a mode bearing some resemblance to other practices, which are supposed, on a very probable conjecture, to have been in use in those times.

NOTE F, PAGE 141.

“ Being thus doubtful in my chamber, one fair day in the summer, my casement being open towards the south, the sun shining clear, and no wind stirring, I took my book *de Veritate* in my hands, and kneeling on my knees, devoutly said these words: ‘*O thou eternal God, author of this light which now shines upon me, and giver of all inward illuminations, I do beseech thee, of thine infinite goodness, to pardon a greater request than a sinner ought to make. I am not satisfied enough whether I shall publish this book: if it be for thy glory, I beseech thee give me some sign from heaven: if not, I shall suppress it.*’ I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud, though yet gentle noise, came forth from the heavens (for it was like nothing on earth), which did so cheer and comfort me that I took my petition as granted, and that I had the sign I demanded, whereupon also I resolved to print my book. This, how strange soever it may seem, I protest, before the eternal God, is true; neither am I any way superstitiously deceived herein; since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the

serenest sky that ever I saw, being without all cloud, did, to my thinking, see the place from whence it came." *Leland's Deistical Writers*, Vol. I. Letter ii.

NOTE G, PAGE 168.

Observe the language of a nearly contemporary historian. "Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos, et quæsitissimis pœnis affectit quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat. Auctor nominis ejus Christus, qui Tiberio imperante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus est. Repressa in præsens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo per Judæam originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt, celebranturque. Igitur primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt. Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis connecti laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defuisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur." *Tac. Ann.* lib. xv. c. 44. Lardner, vii. p. 253.

NOTE H, PAGE 203.

Yet this is what he does say, if he has any meaning at all in such animadversions on the histories commonly deemed miraculous, as those of which a sample is given in Note E, p. 344. But, if in all such cases a mere ordinary event is said to be fraudulently represented as

miraculous, this is to put no less force on the actual representation, than would suffice to destroy the entire history altogether. All such attempts are at best superfluous labour. It is quite as easy to believe that the Israelites never went up out of Egypt at all, as to believe that Moses would attempt to convince them that they were preceded by a miraculous fire and cloud, when they were in reality preceded by only an ordinary fire, such as was used afterwards in the Persian armies.

NOTE I, PAGE 205.

See Douglas's *Criterion*, p. 76—82. This work is, I believe, not minutely accurate in all which is said in it of the comparatively recent date at which the power of working miracles was first ascribed to Xavier by the Roman Catholics. But it is, I think, manifest from Xavier's own epistles, that this humble-minded man, though abundantly credulous with regard to some interpositions of Providence which he was disposed to account miraculous*, did not consider himself as possessed of this power. Nor can any thing get over Acosta's confession: "*Altera causa in nobis est cur Apostolica prædicatio institui omnino non possit Apostolicè, quòd miraculorum nulla facultas sit, quæ Apostoli plurima perpetrabant.*"^b

* Xaverii *Epist. a Tursellino*. 8vo. *Moguntiaë*, 1600. Lib. i. Ep. iv. p. 28. Lib. iii. Ep. iv. p. 162.

^b Acosta *de Proc. Indorum Salute*. 1589. Lib. ii. ch. viii. Cited in Murphy's *Review of the important controversy concerning Miracles*, 8vo. 1759. p. 449.

NOTE K, PAGE 210.

The *probability* of a religion is a *presumption* in favour of it; but it is material to observe that the *real* presumption, afforded by a *real* probability, may be, and *often* is, very different from the *apparent* probability which may happen to come under observation. Antecedently to examination we may have one set of presumptions; subsequently to examination another set; and the subsequent presumptions may be strong, or even indisputable, though the antecedent, which are formed in comparative ignorance, may be exceedingly weak or precarious. See note A, pp. 336, 337.

I may here add, that the *antecedent* presumptions of the truth or value of any religion or revelation, are most properly applicable, not in proving its truth, but in proof of its claims on our regard or attention. Their import in this respect is considered in Chap. VI.

NOTE L, PAGE 215.

This account by Justin of the annihilation of Brennus's army seems to be very greatly exaggerated. It may deserve a question, indeed, whether Brennus *was* defeated, or whether he did not succeed in his attempt upon Delphi. Cf. Strabo. l. iv. Καὶ τοὺς Τεκτοσάγας δὲ φασὶ μετασχεῖν τῆς ἐπὶ Δελφοῦς στρατείας, καὶ τοὺς τε θησαυροὺς τοὺς εὐρεθέντας

παρ' αὐτοῖς ὑπὸ Καιπίωνος τοῦ στρατηγοῦ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐν πόλει Τολώσῃ τῶν ἐκεῖθεν χρημάτων μέρος εἶναι φασί. Warburton's Julian, note p. 299.

NOTE M, PAGE 230.

“ During the famous siege of Breda in 1625, the garrison was afflicted with the scurvy in a most dreadful degree. When the Prince of Orange heard of their distress, and understood that the city was in danger of being delivered up to the enemy by the soldiers, he wrote letters addressed to the men promising them the most speedy relief. These were accompanied with medicines against the scurvy, said to be of great price, but of still greater efficacy: many more were yet to be sent them. The effects of this deceit were truly astonishing! Three small phials of medicine were given to each physician, not enough for the recovery of two patients. It was publicly given out, that three or four drops were sufficient to impart a healing virtue to a gallon of liquor. We now displayed our wonder-working balsams: nor were even the commanders let into the secret of the cheat put upon the soldiers. They flocked in crowds about us, every one soliciting that part may be reserved for their use. Cheerfulness again appears on every countenance, and an universal faith prevails in the sovereign virtues of the remedies. The herbs now beginning to spring up above the ground, we of these make decoctions, to which wormwood and camphor were added, that by the prevalent fla-

vour of those they might appear medicines of no mean efficacy. The stiff contracted limbs were anointed with wax melted in rapeseed or linseed oil. The invention of new and untried physic is boasted; and amidst a defect of every necessary and useful medicine, a strange medley of drugs was compounded. The effect, however, of the delusion was really astonishing, for many were quickly and perfectly recovered. Such as had not moved their limbs for a month before, were seen walking the streets, sound, straight, and whole. They boasted of their cure by the Prince's remedy; the motion of their joints being restored by a simple friction with oil; and the belly now of itself well performing its office, or at least with a small assistance from medicine. Many who declared they had been rendered worse by all former remedies administered, recovered in a few days, to their inexpressible joy, and the no less general surprise, by their taking (almost by their having brought to them) what we affirmed to them to be their gracious Prince's cure."^a

NOTE N, PAGE 233.

"The commissioners, now determined to discover what

^a Frederic Vander Mye, *De Morbis et Symptomatibus Popularibus Bredanis, tempore obsidionis*, as quoted from Dr. Lind's *Treatise on the Scurvy*, in an *Essay on the Imagination as a cause and as a cure of the disorders of the body*, by J. Haygarth, M.D. 1801. pp. 29, 30.

share imagination had in this business, blindfolded several of the common people, and made them sometimes think that they were magnetized; at other times they magnetized them without letting them know that they did so: the consequence was, that when they supposed themselves magnetized, the patients likewise thought they felt something, and *vice versâ*. A magnetized tree was said to produce convulsions: a young man, blindfolded, fell into convulsions when he imagined himself near the tree, though he was really at a considerable distance from it. . . . The same influence of imagination was observed in a woman accustomed to have convulsions when magnetized. They came on when nothing was done to her, on being told, when blinded, that she was magnetized." *Encyclop. Brit. Art. Magnetism animal.*

NOTE O, PAGE 234.

"With the permission of Dr. Fox, I operated upon JAMES PRIOR, who had been under his care three months with a paralysis of the flexor tendons of both hands. This was certainly a case in which little was to be expected, and I feared would prove a stumbling-block to my reputation. In three minutes, however (the tractors having been drawn from the elbow to the wrist), he felt the back of his hand become sensibly warmer, and after four minutes had elapsed, he could actually touch the palm of the hand with the middle finger of his left hand,

A A

which he had not been able to effect for more than two months before. The right arm did not appear to be much affected at first, but in a few trials he began to have some power over that also; the left hand was, in the course of a fortnight, so far restored, that he could almost clench his fist; and soon afterwards he left the hospital. By accident I since met him, when he shewed me with much pleasure, that he still retained the use of his hand; but the other had relapsed into its former useless state."

The case which follows this is at least equally remarkable. It is the case of a man "who had for four years been troubled with pains and weakness in his right arm." We have here the accounts of four applications of the fictitious tractors at intervals of one, four, and seven days. On the first of these trials "I learned", says the surgeon, "that he had experienced a good deal of pain during the operation." The next day, the patient "in one minute feels the pain coming on at the same place as yesterday; the limb feels warm; pain higher up and sharper; in two minutes, pain increases; in three and a half, very acute, darting towards the collar-bone, and begins to give him so much uneasiness that he will not have it done any longer, perspires profusely, and is gone to bed." On the third of these trials, "Dr. Lovell made use of one bit of mahogany, whilst I gently drew down his arm the point of the other. When he sat down, 'he was perfectly easy.' In a few seconds, the pain commenced as before;

in two minutes, it was very acute at the elbow and collar-bone; in four he became very uneasy, looked very red in the face, and begged the operation might be discontinued. His request was complied with, and he immediately went to bed, with a pulse at 120." On the subsequent trial, "the man dreaded the operation so much, that he requested to have it done in bed In a few seconds a spasm was evident upon the *biceps flexor cubiti*: in two minutes, pain in the arm and collar-bone; in three, increased in the hand and arm-pit, and continued in pain some time after the operation, which had considerably accelerated his pulse." *Dr. Haygarth on the Imagination*, pp. 10—12.

NOTE P, PAGE 291.

The two leading propositions of Paley's Treatise on the Evidences, are stated by him as follows:—

"Part I. Of the direct historical evidence of Christianity, and wherein it is distinguished from the evidence alleged for other miracles."

"Prop. I. That there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct."

“ Prop. II. That there is not satisfactory evidence that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain as these are, have ever acted in the same manner,” &c.

N.B. A note should, perhaps, have been inserted in p. 272, for the purpose of explaining, that the observations there made are meant to be understood, as indeed the argument implies, only of what may be called the *external* testimony, or of the degree of credit due *personally* to the witnesses. *Of all internal evidence* the detail of particulars must usually be a very essential portion. In the internal evidence is included the whole proof of the probability of the facts or doctrines advanced, and of their consistency with themselves, and with other facts or doctrines made known to us in any way whatsoever.

THE END.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK.

AN INQUIRY, chiefly on **PRINCIPLES** of **RELIGION**, into the **NATURE** and **DISCIPLINE** of **HUMAN MOTIVES**. In 1 vol. 8vo. Price 10s. 6d.

* * The Object of this Work is to supply a manifest *Desideratum* in Moral and Theological Science, by showing systematically the Connection between the Principles of Religion and those of Virtue.

A RECAPITULATION of some of the leading **PRINCIPLES** contained in a Treatise entitled an **INQUIRY** into the **NATURE** and **DISCIPLINE** of **HUMAN MOTIVES**. With an Introductory Preface, and Additions. Price 2s. 6d.

ALSO PUBLISHED

BY **BALDWIN, CRADOCK AND JOY**.

TWENTY DISCOURSES preached before the University of Cambridge, in the year 1820, at the Lecture founded by the Rev. **JOHN HULSE**. By **C. BENSON, M.A.** Rector of St. Giles in the Fields, London, and Prebendary of Worcester. Fourth Edition, 8vo. Price 12s.

SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES: Twenty Discourses, preached at the **HULSEAN LECTURE**, in the year 1822. By the **SAME**. Second Edition. Price 12s.

“The proofs and the duties of Christianity have been enforced by Mr. Benson with a power, an earnestness, and an unction, which they who heard the preacher will be thankful for while they live; and which, in the perusal, must to every healthful mind communicate satisfaction, profit and delight; and may carry healing and comfort to the diseased one.” *Quarterly Review*, No. 56.

THE CHRONOLOGY of **OUR SAVIOUR'S LIFE**; or, An Inquiry into the true Time of the Birth, Baptism and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. By the same Author. 8vo. Price 6s. boards.

OBSERVATIONS on the **CANONICAL SCRIPTURES**. By **MARY CORNWALLIS** of Wittersham. In 4 vols. 8vo. Second Edition, Revised and Corrected. Price 2l. 2s.

THE WORKS of **WILLIAM PALEY, D.D.** with additional Sermons, &c. and a corrected account of the Life and

WORKS PUBLISHED BY

Writings of the Author. By his Son, the Rev. EDMUND PALEY, A.M. Vicar of Easingwold. In 7 vols. 8vo. elegantly printed, with an excellent Portrait from Romney's Picture. Price 2*l.* 16*s.* boards.

SERMONS on Various Subjects (not before published). By WILLIAM PALEY, D.D. Edited by the Rev. EDMUND PALEY, A. M. Vicar of Easingwold. In 2 vols. 8vo. Price 18*s.* boards.

AN EPITOME of PALEY'S EVIDENCES of CHRISTIANITY; containing the Substance of the Arguments comprised in that Work, in the Catechetical Form. By a Member of the University of Cambridge. In 12mo. Price 3*s.*

AN EPITOME of PALEY'S PRINCIPLES of MORAL and POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY; containing the Substance of the Arguments comprised in that Work, in a Catechetical Form. By the SAME. In 12mo. Price 4*s.*

THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM UNFOLDED; in a Course of Practical Essays on the Principal Doctrines and Duties of Christianity. By THOMAS ROBINSON, M.A. Vicar of St. Mary's, Leicester, and late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Third Edition. In 3 vols. 8vo. Price 1*l.* 4*s.*

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS; or, a Practical Improvement of the Principal Histories of the Old and New Testaments. By the Same. With a Biographical Account of the Author. A New Edition. In 3 vols. 8vo. Price 1*l.* 7*s.*

PROPHECIES of the MESSIAH, Considered and Improved, in Practical Essays. By the Same. In 8vo. Price 9*s.*

* * The whole Works in 7 vols. 8vo. Price 3*l.*

LECTURES on the TEMPER and SPIRIT of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION; first written and delivered to the Inmates of a large public Asylum, now published and addressed to the numerous Parties which agitate and divide this Empire. By WILLIAM ALLEN, E.M.; R.M.; S.E. &c. Author of "Outlines of a Course of Lectures on Chemical Philosophy," &c. Small 8vo. Price 8*s.*

LETTERS to a FRIEND, on the EVIDENCES, DOCTRINES and DUTIES of the CHRISTIAN RE-

BALDWIN, CRADOCK AND JOY.

LIGION. By OLINTHUS GREGORY, LL.D. of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. Fourth Edition, with Corrections and Additions. In 2 vols. 8vo. Price 14s. boards.

MORNING COMMUNINGS with GOD; or, Devotional Meditations for every Day of the Year. Translated from the Original German of CHRISTIAN CHRISTOPHER STURM, Author of "Reflections," &c. By WILLIAM JOHNSTONE, A.M. In 2 vols. royal 12mo. Price 16s.

. It is most extraordinary that this work should now appear for the first time in the English language, having been even more popular on the Continent than the "Reflections" of the same Author, and containing Devotional Exercises and Aspirations of the highest eloquence and the purest Christianity.

"On opening this work we were agreeably surprised at finding genius and taste in accompaniment with warmth of soul. In perusing them (Klopstock and Gesner) we breathe the atmosphere of the blessed, and feel that holiness is the essence of a perfect felicity. It is the soul of these works that renders them so delightful, and in a similar spirit are written these 'Communings with God,'—these effusions of unembodied nature. They are very frequently sublime; always dignified:—not the *huzzaing* of Christ as if he were a demagogue or a conqueror; but the grand and silent adoration of the uplifted eyes of a martyr."—*Gent's Mag.*

A SKETCH of the DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS of the CHRISTIAN WORLD. To which is prefixed, an Outline of Atheism, Deism, Theophilanthropism, Mahometanism, Judaism and Christianity; with a Persuasive to Religious Moderation. Fourteenth Edition. With the addition of an Account of the Sauds, an Indian Sect resembling the Quakers; of the recent Seceders from the Church of England; and of the Jerkers and Barkers in the United States of America; embellished also with a new Engraving of Eight Heads. In 12mo. Price 6s. boards.

THE GOLDEN CENTENARY; or, One Hundred Testimonies in behalf of Candour, Peace and Unanimity, by Divines of the Church of England, of the Kirk of Scotland, and among Protestant Dissenters, with their respective Biographies concentrated. Designed as a Sequel to the Sketch of the Denominations of the Christian World. By the same Author. The Fifth Edition. Enlarged and Improved. In royal 18mo. with portraits. Price 5s.

WORKS BY BALDWIN, CRADOCK AND JOY.

THE BIBLE ATLAS; or, Sacred Geography, delineated, in a complete Series of Scriptural Maps, drawn from the latest and best authorities, and engraved by Richard Palmer. Dedicated by permission to his Grace the Archbishop of York. Engraved on 26 small 4to plates. Price 16s. coloured, or 12s. plain, neatly half-bound.

These Maps are all newly constructed, after a careful and critical examination of the recent discoveries of Burckhardt, Richardson, Henniker, Wells, &c.; and references to them are facilitated by a copious consulting Index.

A HEBREW GRAMMAR in the **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**. By **JOSEPH SAMUEL C. F. FREY**. To which are added, a Glossary of the first six Psalms, a Compendium of Chaldee Grammar, and other important additions. By **GEORGE DOWNES, A.M.** late of Trinity College, Dublin. A New and Enlarged Edition, 8vo. Price 7s.

* * An attempt is now made to remedy a deficiency which has long existed in works of this description, the almost utter omission of Syntax; while in no language, perhaps, is this department of Grammar of such paramount importance.

A GREEK and ENGLISH MANUAL LEXICON to the **NEW TESTAMENT**, with Examples of the Irregular Inflections, &c. By **J. H. BASS**, 18mo. Price 4s. boards.

The object of this Work is to offer to the Public, in a form fitted to bind up with the Pocket Greek Testaments, all that is necessary for a general understanding of that part of the Holy Scriptures in the Greek Tongue; and it contains many words commonly omitted in other Lexicons.

IN THE PRESS.

SERMONS, EXPLANATORY and PRACTICAL, on the **THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES** of the **CHURCH of ENGLAND**, in a Series of Forty Discourses, delivered at the Parish Church of St. Alphage, Greenwich. By the Rev. **T. WAITE, D.C.L.** Chaplain to **H. R. H. the Duke of Gloucester**, and to the **Rt. Hon. and Rt. Rev. the Bishop of Oxford**; and Master of the Grammar School, Lewisham Hill. In 8vo.

